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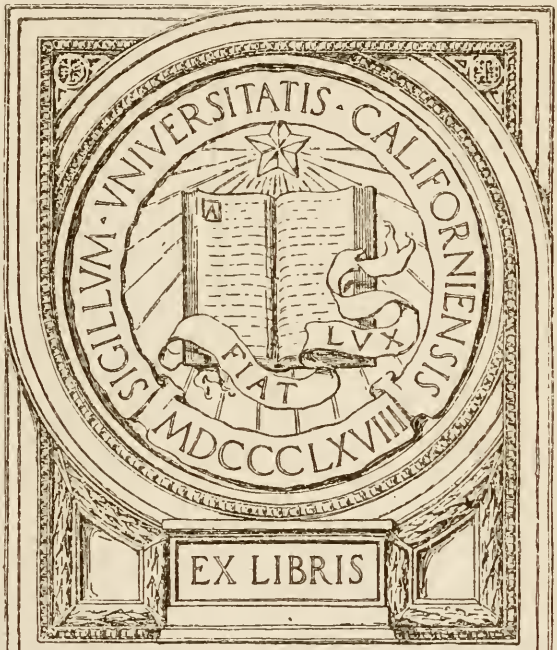

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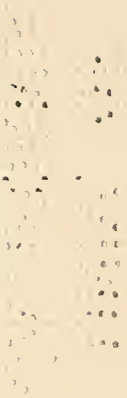
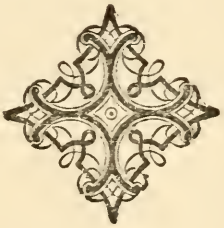


The rich, creamy satin flowed all about her to the floor (*page 216*)

Miss Philura's Wedding Gown

By FLORENCE MORSE KINGSLEY

Author of "The Transfiguration of Miss Philura,', "The Resurrection of Miss Cynthia," etc.



WITH FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS

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IN MEMORIAM
Mary J. L. McDonald

I

As on a memorable occasion in her not distant past, Miss Philura Rice leaned forward and gazed at the reflection of herself which looked back at her from out the somewhat dim and clouded surface of the mirror atop her shabby little bureau. The mirror in question was cracked diagonally across its surface, the fact being hinted at by the blue ribbon pinned over the crack.

Now it is a custom quite as old as the race itself to gaze at one's reflection in the looking-glass. Everyone does it; generally in private, in the solitude of one's own dressing-room, but sometimes in public catching unexpected and often disconcerting views of one's face and person in some cunningly placed mirror. For example, Jones, dining at a downtown res-

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taurant, catches sight of a fellow eating at a table near him.

"What a disagreeable-looking chap," cogitates Jones. "I don't like his nose; nor his eyebrows, nor the set of his coat, nor the way he uses his knife and fork."

Then it suddenly dawns on Jones that the whole side of the restaurant is one huge mirror, and that he has been gazing at himself, Jones, and that he doesn't in the least like the looks of Jones. He tries to comfort himself by the reflection that, after all, it wasn't any sort of a looking-glass, not to be compared with the shaving-glass on his own dresser at home, with which morning presentment of himself he is complacently familiar; but somewhere in the back of his brain lurks the conviction that for once, at least, he has beheld himself as others see him, and that Jones is a commonplace, not to say disagreeable-looking fellow.

But all this is quite beside the mark, when one comes to the consideration of Miss Philura's inspection of her small person in the cracked mirror of her own little bedroom.

Miss Philura's earnest blue eyes were not concerning themselves with the faint lines about her delicate lips, nor even with the vague mist of silver glinting the brown hair about her ears.

No; quite frankly and unaffectedly the lady was studying the effect of her dress, a world too large for her. The material was good; there could be no question as to that. It was a satin brocade, exhibiting large, sprawling leaves of black on a purple background. It was rich and lustrous, and the unfashionable skirt swept in billowy folds about the slender figure, which continued to twist and turn from side to side before the cracked mirror.

The crack curiously interrupted and diversified the view, so that Miss Philura

saw, as it were, her small person in sections, like an imperfectly constructed picture puzzle. But when one has used an article, however imperfect, for a matter of thirty years, one learns to make allowances.

Nevertheless and also notwithstanding, Miss Philura presently divested herself of the black and purple gown with a pensive sigh.

"If only it wasn't black — and purple," she murmured, "and if the leaves weren't so large and — creepy."

Miss Philura sighed a second time, as she took from the table a violet-tinted sheet of note paper, exhaling the odour of violets, both colour and perfume being particularly affected by the writer of the words scrawled in loose, fashionable characters across the page.

"My dear Philura,"— she read for the second time — "I own that I was exceedingly surprised, I might almost say

shocked to learn of your contemplated marriage to the Reverend Mr. Pettibone. Had you seen fit to consult me before taking so serious a step I should have advised strongly against it. Your life, passed as it has been amid humble surroundings, and with the very limited means of culture and improvement I have been able to afford you from time to time, during your brief stays at my home in Boston, have hardly fitted you (in my opinion) for the very grave responsibilities you appear so eager to assume.

"Let me implore you, before it is too late, to withdraw from the false position in which you find yourself. At your time of life, my dear Philura, there can be no romantic ideas concerning love and marriage, which sometimes serve as an excuse for more youthful follies. Should you, however, ignore my advice, as I fear — you will incur the very grave risk attendant upon marriage with an elderly wid-

ower (as I understand Mr. Pettibone to be) with your eyes open.

"I am sending you with this an outworn gown of my own, which, should you persist in rushing in where angels fear to tread, will make over into a suitable dress for the occasion of the marriage."

This missive, which Miss Philura perused with a faint frown between her childish brows, was signed, "I am, my dear Philura, most sincerely yours, Caroline P. Van Duser."

The time had been, and that not so long since, when Miss Philura would have been utterly annihilated, crushed, beaten and routed from any position whatsoever by such a letter, signed with the authoritative name, Caroline P. Van Duser. Now she folded the sheet with brisk motions of her roughened finger-tips, returned it to its envelope with a little laugh. Then, still brisk and smiling, she hung the rustling brocade away in her closet.

On the way downstairs she even hummed a verse of an ancient hymn, which had clung to her memory ever since a memorable Sunday marking the beginning of the marvellous new experience which had blossomed in the bleak and barren waste of her existence.

> "God's purposes will ripen fast,
> Unfolding every hour;
> The bud may have a bitter taste
> But sweet will be the flower,"

she sang under her breath.

Miss Philura's blue eyes were very bright, her thin cheeks very pink, as she proceeded to set her tiny rooms in the perfection of cleanliness and order which reminded one of the interior of a wave-washed shell or the heart of a morning-glory newly opened to the sun. It was a shabby little house, within and without, but the ancient furniture reflected the bright light of the November day in pol-

ished surfaces, and even the worn rag rugs on the floor exhibited rich and subtle blendings of colour, not unlike those of an eastern prayer-rug.

When all was finished Miss Philura washed her hands and dried them carefully on the roller-towel behind the kitchen door. Then she sat down by the window and glanced shyly out between the green leaves of the newly potted geraniums. The trees were swept bare of leaves in the gales of early November so that one could see, clearly silhouetted against the dazzling blue of the sky, the slender steeple of the Presbyterian church. Next to the church, half hid in sombre evergreens, was the parsonage. Miss Philura blushed delicately as she gazed, her thin hands clasped with the rapture of her thoughts.

Only six months and what changes had come over her life. She must needs pity the Miss Philura of that unthinkable time when nobody loved her, and she had faced

a dreary vista of days, monotonously alike, beginning with half-hearted prayers to what she fancied a cold-hearted, critical Judge, seated aloft in a distant heaven all gold and glittering gems; then had come the revelation. And after all, it had come about through Cousin Caroline Van Duser.

Miss Philura recalled for the thousandth time the day she had made herself ready to accompany Mrs. Van Duser to the Ontological Club in Boston. She pictured with positive relish her shrinking self, seated meekly opposite the magnificent person of Mrs. J. Mortimer Van Duser, wearing the ill-fitting dress of black alpaca, and the obsolete bonnet tied primly under her chin.

"And my hair!" she murmured, addressing her maltese cat, who was watching her with a reflective gleam in his jewel-like eyes. "Do you remember, Mortimer, how I used to fix my hair?"

The name of Miss Philura's cat marked her one previous ebulition of what she had sadly recognised as that phase of character known in theological circles as "unregenerate human nature." But the cat had so resembled the husband of Mrs. J. Mortimer Van Duser, with his cold, calculating eyes, his feline neatness of person, his well-tended whiskers and the terrifying gaze he was wont to bestow upon her small self, when at infrequent intervals she appeared at his hospitable board. The inevitable meeting with that awe-inspiring millionaire (who had the honour of calling Mrs. Caroline P. Van Duser his wife) was almost enough to deter one from seeking light and culture in the undeniable centre of all light and culture.

Mr. J. Mortimer Van Duser never appeared to remember her from one visit to the next, and merely growled (like a cat over a mouse, Miss Philura could not help thinking) when Mrs. Van Duser drew his

inscrutable gaze upon herself, with the majestic words:

"You will remember my third cousin, Philura Rice, Mortimer? I felt that it was my duty to afford Philura the opportunity of attending the course of lectures on the Proper Attitude of the Masses to the Classes, which, owing to other engagements, I am unable to attend."

So she had called her grey kitten Mortimer in a spirit of uncharitable reprisal which made her positively afraid to say her prayers for two whole days. As for Mortimer, he had grown into a stately, dignified personage of a cat, whose green eyes frequently assumed the veritable expression of the Boston millionaire, and Miss Philura continued to call him Mortimer, as has been stated.

If Mortimer remembered how Miss Philura used to arrange her hair, he made no response. Instead he yawned discreetly, his pink tongue curling back between his

cruel, sharp-pointed teeth like a leaf.

"I was a fright, Morty dear," quoth Miss Philura, waxing familiar and affectionate. "I am sure he never would have thought of — of — loving me, with my hair combed back tight and done up in a hard knot!"

Mortimer turned his back upon his mistress, and wound himself into a graceful coil of grey fur breathing selfish comfort. His opinion on the subject of Miss Philura's coiffure he kept to himself.

"If I hadn't found out," pursued Miss Philura, her wistful eyes on the parsonage roof, which peeped at her through a pair of dormer windows, "about the Encircling Good, I should never — "

She broke off with a little laugh.

"And here I am worrying — actually worrying about my wedding-dress!"

A brisk jingle of the feeble door-bell interrupted the little lady's further cogitations. She hurried to answer it, a becom-

ing colour in her cheeks. One could never tell when Mr. Pettibone (she hadn't been able yet to bring herself to call him Silas) might call.

But it wasn't the minister's tall figure which confronted her on the door-step, but a woman, clad in a heavy woolen shawl. She wore coarse blue mittens like those of a man, and a wing of snowy hair folded her rough red cheeks on either side.

Miss Philura's colour faded a little as her eyes fell upon the quaint figure.

"Good morning, Huldah," she said. "I —"

"Here's your butter, miss," said the woman, thrusting a small package into Miss Philura's unwilling hand.

Her black eyes snapped and she nodded her head vigorously.

"It's good enough for Queen Victory, if she was livin' to eat it, an' so I guess it's good enough for you."

"But, Huldah," quavered Miss Philura,

"I — I know it's good. I — never found fault with the butter."

Miss Philura bethought herself that she was going to marry the minister, and drew herself up with gracious dignity as she added,

"Your butter, Huldah, is excellent — excellent. But I have thought it best for — my health to refrain from eating butter for the present."

The butter woman fixed her bright, bird-like eyes upon Miss Philura.

"Butter's fattening," she said at last.

"Fattening?" echoed Miss Philura weakly. "Yes, I suppose it is."

"You'd ought to eat it," pursued the butter woman, "you'd ought to eat a good an' plenty of it, three times a day."

She nodded at Miss Philura, as if to defy her to prove the contrary.

A delicate colour fluttered in Miss Philura's cheeks.

"Then you think — " she murmured.

"They like 'em fat," said the butter woman, still defiant. "Don't I know 'em? They like 'em round and plump an' soft an' smooth."

"I don't think I understand you, Huldah," said Miss Philura, very dignified indeed, though still gracious.

"Minister's ain't no different from other men, as I know of," insisted the butter woman.

She waved her hand conclusively.

"You ain't no fatter 'an that poker, ma'am."

"It — it's quite fashionable to be slender, Huldah," said Miss Philura, almost piteously.

She gazed sidewise at the poker, standing stiffly beside the fireless grate, its brazen head reflecting the light in its polished surface.

"I — I should dislike to be really fat, you know."

The butter woman stood up, with the

air of one who has finished argument and downed dispute. She drew from under her shawl a basket, and from the basket she produced and laid upon the table, each with a defiant thump, a plump chicken, a roll of butter, and a dozen eggs in a paper bag.

"Now these 'ere things," she said, in a tone which brooked no denial, "I want you should eat. Don't you go to carrying broth to nobody, ner yet eggs, ner yet butter."

"But, Huldah, I — Oh, they look very nice, but — "

"Don't I know you're gettin' ready t' be married? An' o' course you don't think o' nothin' else, mornin', noon an' night. I can't give you no silver spoons fer a weddin' present, though land knows I'd like to, with your ma buyin' butter o' me fer a matter o' ten years stiddy, an' you never missin' your half pound a week since she was laid away eight years come

April. So if you'll take a pound or two from me — it ought to be five at the very least — fer a weddin' present, why — !"

Miss Philura's blue eyes filled with sudden tears.

"How kind and good of you to have thought of it, Huldah. Thank you a thousand times!"

She took the butter woman's toil hardened hand in both her own and squeezed it gratefully.

"There, there! it ain't nothin' 'n' with me a churnin' twice in the week, an' chickens fairly under foot. I'm comin' again a week from to-day, an' I wan't t' see you a mite heavier 'an you be now."

She felt Miss Philura's fragile little arm with an experienced thumb and finger, and eyed her appraisingly.

"A matter o' ten pounds wouldn't do no harm," she murmured. "Well, my advice t' you is, lay abed mornin's, and eat es hearty es you kin. Land! I'd fatten

you, if I'd jest have you under my eye fer a while."

She pinned her shawl together with an energetic stab of a black headed pin.

"When's the weddin'?" she demanded gruffly.

"Why, we hope — we expect it will be on Thanksgiving Day," faltered Miss Philura, trembling visibly, in view of the near approach of her great happiness.

The butter woman stared past the blushing, wistful face.

"On Thanksgiving Day," she muttered. "On Thanksgiving Day."

"Perhaps you think it an odd day to be married on," Miss Philura's gentle voice went on, "but Mr. Pettibone's congregation seemed to think that they ought all to be invited to the wedding. We should have liked it to be very quiet, but there was some feeling — Mr. Pettibone says. So we thought as the church would have to be opened and warmed on Thanks-

giving Day — for the regular services, you know — why, it might be as well to take advantage — "

The butter woman did not appear to be listening. She fetched a great sigh, and shook her broad shoulders.

"Oh, well," she said, "there's no use to be harkin' back to what's past an' gone. But it's hard not to be doin' it, when the summer's over an' gone an' naught remains but dead leaves blowin' hither an' yon."

"The cold weather seems to be setting in early this year," offered Miss Philura vaguely.

Her thoughts had reverted once more to the purple and black brocade, hanging in her wardrobe upstairs.

The butter woman was looking at her keenly, her mouth puckered into a half smile.

"Whatever you do," she said briskly, "lay abed an' eat — eat hearty betwixt

now an' Thanksgivin' Day. They ain't nothin' he'll like so well."

Miss Philura looked puzzled.

"You mean — ?" she began.

The butter woman nodded, her bright eyes half hid in wrinkles of mirth.

"The' ain't a man livin' as likes t' marry a livin' skelton, ner yet a bag o' bones. They like 'em nice an' fat."

With which she darted down the steps, climbed into her wagon and drove away, before Miss Philura had done blushing.

II

All the world is said to love a lover; but there are "ifs" and "buts" and sundry exceptions to this as to every other sweeping statement of a more or less general truth.

For example, Miss Electa Pratt, engaged in wringing out her dish-cloth, with hard twists of her bony fingers, felt no soft emotions of affection welling up in her virgin bosom as she caught sight of Philura Rice hurrying past the house, her small figure bent against the roaring wind that swept the fallen leaves into miniature whirlpools, and lashed the leafless branches overhead.

Miss Philura was clutching at her hat brim with one shabbily gloved hand, and it was this fact, simple and natural as it was, which brought Miss Pratt into the

maternal presence, placidly engaged in knitting out of blue wool what she was pleased to term a fascinator; the fascinator in question was intended for the sole use of Electa; but the fact did not soften the asperity of that lady's tones as she said,

"If there ain't Philura Rice, a-hangin' ont' that hat o' hern for dear life."

"You don't say, Lecty," observed Mrs. Pratt, to the busy tune of her needles. "Well now, I guess the wind's a-blowin' some this mornin', ain't it? I've been listenin' to it roarin' down the chimbly. It reminds me of the day your pa passed away."

Mrs. Pratt was considered perversely charitable by her daughter, who was in the habit of telling everybody that ma was failing right along, and that since her last annual attack of grippe she wasn't quite right in her mind.

"I'd laugh if them feathers o' hern got

carried away," said Miss Electa vindictively. "It would serve her right."

"Fer gettin' the minister away from you, I s'pose," said the old lady. "But land! I don't think he'd a thought o' such a thing as marryin' you, Lecty."

"There you go again, ma," cried Miss Pratt, justly incensed. "How many times have I got to tell you that I wouldn't marry Silas Pettibone, not if he was the last man on earth. Now you hear me, Ma Pratt; an' don't you das' t' say anything like that t' Mis' Puffer, if she runs in, or t' anybody else. The *i-de-a!*"

Mrs. Pratt was counting stiches.

"Knit ten; purl five," she murmured. "Did you say you was goin' down t' th' post-office, daughter, t' git the 'Best Idea'?"

"Yes, ma," replied Miss Electa, aware of the value of a change of thought. "If Mis' Puffer or Mis' Buckthorne come in, tell 'em I won't be gone ten minutes. I'll

bring you some pep'mints if you —"

She had almost said " if you'll be good." But a glance into the meek, softly wrinkled old face deterred her somehow.

" Mother's awful contrary lately," she cogitated as she hurried down the street, bent upon overtaking the wind-swept figure of Miss Philura.

" She's goin' t' the store!" said Miss Pratt under her breath, and she hurried faster than before.

Just why she so strongly desired to see with her own eyes what Philura Rice was about to purchase at George Trimmer's Dry-goods Emporium, doubtless with a view to her approaching marriage, Electa Pratt could not possibly have told; but the desire was there and it urged her on. However, she was doomed to disappointment; Miss Philura emerged from the shop just as her friend, Miss Pratt, came abreast of it, serene and smiling, and car-

rying in one hand a small, a very small parcel.

"Good-morning, Electa," was Miss Philura's greeting.

But she seemed disposed to hurry away in the opposite direction.

Miss Pratt linked herself to the bride-elect with prompt decision.

"My! I haven't seen you for an age," she began. "I've been over to your house twice lately, when I was most sure you was home, an' rang an' rang."

Miss Philura blushed guiltily.

On one of these occasions she and Mr. Pettibone had been snugly ensconced behind the geraniums in her little parlour, and Mr. Pettibone had (she blushed a deeper pink to think of it) merely tightened the clasp of his arm about her waist and remarked:

"It's Electa Pratt; we don't want to see her. Let her ring!"

It had seemed almost irreligious to Miss

Philura. Never in her life had she dared to disobey that peremptory summons. But she had sat quite still while the bell jangled spitefully under Electa's determined hand.

"I was most sure I saw the minister go int' your house not ten minutes before," went on Miss Pratt. "I was over t' Mis' Buckthorne's, an' we both saw him."

"M — m," murmured Miss Philura. "Perhaps I — perhaps my door-bell — "

"You needn't bother t' tell *another* lie t' me, Philura Rice," intoned Miss Pratt.

"*Another* — What do you mean, Electa?"

"I never said one word about it to you before," said Miss Pratt firmly, "but I'm goin' to *now*. Do you remember telling me you was engaged to be married last spring, just after you come back from visitin' your relations in Boston?"

Miss Philura drew a deep sigh.

"I — I would rather not — talk about

it, Electa. I — you wouldn't understand."

"Oh, wouldn't I?" retorted Miss Pratt. "Well, I can try anyhow. We was comin' out of church; it was the Sunday you first come out in that new suit of yours an' that hat with feathers — I shouldn't think you'd want to wear 'em out in a wind like this; they look all frazzled out."

Miss Philura straightened herself.

"If these feathers are spoiled I can have others," she said.

Miss Pratt cackled derision.

"That's just the way you talked before," she said. "I sez t' you, 'Everybody says you've had money left to you, an' that you're goin' t' get married,' I sez. An' you sez, 'I've got all the money I need,' you sez, 'an' I'm engaged t' be married.'"

Miss Philura's blue eyes gazed almost defiantly into Electa Pratt's green ones.

"Well," she said, "I know I said it. It was true! — every word true."

A singular radiance overspread her delicate face transfiguring it for a moment into beauty.

"Do you mean to tell me you was engaged to be married to Mr. Pettibone when you said that to me, Philura Rice? *Be careful!*"

"You went to see Mr. Pettibone afterward and told him what I said," returned Miss Philura unexpectedly. "And he —"

"He said it wasn't so."

Miss Pratt threw up her chin aggressively.

"An' what's more, your cousin Van Duser said it wasn't so. She said you didn't have money left you and that you weren't goin' t' be married. *So there!*"

Miss Philura pondered, her eyes upon the small paper parcel in her hand. Then she turned suddenly, almost breathlessly, upon the spinster, whose attitude and ex-

pression reminded her irresistibly of Mortimer's at the moment of pouncing upon an unlucky mouse.

"Electa," she said tremulously, "you aren't very happy, are you?"

"Happy?" echoed Miss Pratt. "*Happy — me?* Huh! I'd like to know what that's got to do with your telling me —"

"It's got everything to do with it," said Miss Philura. "If you'd only understand; but I'm afraid you wouldn't, even if I —"

"That's the second time you've said that," remarked Miss Pratt acidly. "When it comes to *understanding*, I guess I'm *pretty near* as smart as some other folks I could mention."

"Oh, I know I'm not clever at all, Electa; I didn't mean that."

"Well, what did you mean? I'd really like to hear what you've got to say fer yourself. An' I ain't the only one, you'll

find. There's plenty of folks that's as much in the dark as I be."

The cat-like gleam in Miss Pratt's eyes was lost upon Miss Philura, who was wondering if she ought to lay bare the wonderful secret which she bore about enshrined in her inmost heart like a jewel of price. After all, was not Electa like her lonely, unhappy self of half a year ago? And had she any right to withhold the certainty of happiness from Electa?

Miss Pratt licked her lips.

"Don't hesitate to speak right out, Philura," she said acidly. "How anybody'd dare to say they was engaged before the man proposed is what beats me."

Miss Philura was gazing at her parcel.

"It was because — he — he was in the Encircling Good, Electa. I knew I was going to be married because I — I *believed.* But I didn't — I didn't know — "

Miss Pratt stared.

"He was in the — what?" she de-

manded. "What in the world are you talking about?"

Miss Philura experienced a wild desire to run away.

"Some other time, Electa," she murmured. "If you could only hear Mrs. Smart lecture — you might do that, you know. I can't explain.

"If you don't want me to think you're raving crazy, Philura Rice, you'll explain, as you call it, *this minute!*"

Miss Philura turned her face away from her inquisitor. It appeared more and more impossible to tell Electa Pratt about the All-encircling Good. And yet it was her duty. She had been brought face to face with it. She was almost ashamed to remember at that moment a verse about pearls and swine.

"You are not — "

One acquires the habit of thinking aloud during years of solitude. She had almost said, "You are not a swine, Electa."

"I'm nobody's fool, if that's what you mean, Philura," Miss Pratt observed appositely.

"I know you're not, Electa," Miss Philura agreed eagerly.

Then she gathered courage.

"When I was in Boston, I went with Cousin Caroline Van Duser to hear a lecture at the Ontological Club, and — "

"Uh-huh!" sniffed Miss Pratt.

"It was all about the Encircling Good — God, 'All is God, God is all,' " quoted Miss Philura.

"I had never thought of such a thing, Electa. It always seemed to me God was up high — somewhere, and that He was always displeased with everything I did. But in the lecture I found out that I was mistaken. God is so kind — so generous. If we just ask Him for what we want, and then believe that we have; why, it is ours already."

"And you believed all that stuff, Phi-

lura Rice, and you a church-member?"

"It's in the Bible," said Miss Philura stoutly. "It's true — all true."

Miss Pratt was engaged in the purely rational process of putting two and two together. She arrived presently at the correct result.

"I begin to see," she observed, with carefully veiled sarcasm. "You thought you'd like some fine new clothes and a — husband. So you — "

"Oh, Electa, I'm so glad I told you! You do understand; don't you? It's so beautiful — so wonderful."

Miss Pratt snorted with mingled rage and amazement.

"Quite wonderful, I should remark — and so simple. But I don't see yet how you caught the parson."

Miss Philura looked up swiftly.

"You — you're making fun of — God," she said brokenly. "Oh, I wish I hadn't told you!"

Miss Pratt burst into a short, dry laugh.

"I never heard o' such nonsense in all my life," she cried. "It's downright wicked; that's what it is. You'd ought t' be put out o' the church instead of settin' up as a minister's wife. The i-de-a of talkin' such stuff, an' actually believin' it."

"It's in the Bible," said Miss Philura weakly, and the wind snatched the words and carried them away like dead leaves.

"There's nothin' about silk petticoats an' ostridge feathers an' gettin' engaged in *my* Bible," retorted Miss Pratt, her reddened nose uplifted in chaste protest to an outraged heaven. "I'm sure I don't know what Elder Trimmer an' Deacon Scrimger an' Mis' Deaconess Buckthorne an'— I was goin' t' say our pastor — Does he know what you heard in that wicked club?"

Miss Philura was not a very astute

person; but for once she could not help seeing the drift of Electa Pratt's remarks.

"Mr. Pettibone," she said firmly, "is not in any way responsible for my interpretations of the Bible."

Then having reached her own corner, she parted from Miss Pratt with an air of dignity and decision, which only partly hid her real perturbation of spirit.

The grey cat, Mortimer, arose from the door-step, where he had been awaiting her return, and stretched his sinewy fur-clad limbs. His green eyes grew greedily wide, as he spied the parcel in his mistress' hand.

"No, Morty dear," said Miss Philura; "it isn't meat."

Then her anxious face brightened, as she remembered the plump chicken, the eggs and butter reposing in the kitchen cupboard.

"It was only yesterday," she murmured, "that I was wondering — no

thinking about our dinner, Morty, and I — mentioned it to God — just *mentioned* it, because, you know, our Father knoweth that we have need of all these things."

She lifted the big cat in her thin little arms.

"You shall have a chicken wing to-day, Morty," she whispered in his furry ear.

Mortimer purred loudly, quite as if he understood. Then it was that Miss Philura noticed the bunch of white chrysanthemums laid against the door.

She lifted them, a wistful pink staining her cheeks. Nowhere except in the parsonage garden did chrysanthemums grow in such snowy perfection.

"He has been here," was her unspoken thought, a swift wonder crowding her regret, as she remembered that it was Saturday, a day the minister always spent alone in his study.

When she had arranged her flowers in water, she sat down by the table and gazed

at them almost breathlessly. No one in Innisfield, not even the misister, suspected the shy, still current of poetic feeling in Miss Philura's nature. She could not possibly have put it into words; but something in the ivory white of the curving petals, lapped softly one above another, hiding a heart of gold, spoke to her of herself. All summer long, while rose and hollyhock and a host of lesser blooms had flaunted gaily in the sunshine, the chrysanthemums had spread their dark foliage in an obscure corner, with no hint of bloom; but now —

She leaned forward and touched the flowers with her lips.

"They are beautiful, even if it is almost winter," she murmured.

Then she opened the paper bag she had brought from the Trimmer Emporium, and took out four spools of white silk thread and set them in a row before the flowers.

"Why shouldn't I?" she asked of the surrounding silence.

Then diligently, like the woman in the parable, she searched the nooks and corners of her memory for the exact words she had heard at the Ontological Club.

"'The unseen Good surrounds us on every side'" she said aloud. "'It presses upon us, more limitless, more inexhaustible than the air we breathe — In the Encircling Good is already provided a lavish abundance — a *lavish abundance!*'"

Miss Philura paused to take breath.

"'Of everything one can possibly want. Desire itself is God — Good — Love knocking at the door of your understanding. It is impossible for you to desire anything that is not already your own!'"

Yet like every other wondrous mystery in all the world this unseen Abundance — this All-encircling Good — must be sought in the one right way. It was a magic

door, requiring the magic key for its unlocking.

Miss Philura gazed at the four white spools, and the white flowers, so lately emerged from the Unseen into exquisite visibility.

"Oh, God," she prayed, "I should like a white wedding-dress — white like the chrysanthemums!"

After a breathless little pause she added: "Thank you, God!"

With closed eyes she beheld the as yet invisible wedding garment, white with the creamy whiteness of flower petals closing softly over a heart of gold. Very simple it was, — yet rich and smooth, textured like the blossoms that come just before the snow.

That evening, when the Rev. Silas Pettibone — having conscientiously completed two discourses treating respectively of Sanctification by Faith and the State of the Lost after Death — came to call

upon Miss Philura, as was his right and privilege; he found that little lady deep in the task of ripping the black and purple gown.

"What do you intend to do with that — er — brocade?" asked Mr. Pettibone, searching successfully in a disused corner of his theological mind for a proper name for the stuff which lay in heavy folds across Miss Philura's lap.

The Rev. Silas Pettibone had kind, though very tired looking brown eyes, and the dark hair above his forehead was streaked with grey. Miss Philura secretly considered him the very acme of masculine good looks, a hint of her opinion shone in her demure face as she made answer.

"Cousin Van Duser sent it to me for a wedding dress; do you think it pretty?"

Mr. Pettibone surveyed the stuff with a new interest. He took a fold of it between an inexperienced thumb and finger.

"It appears," he said cautiously, "to be very — er — durable."

"Yes," agreed Miss Philura, "I think it will wear for a long time, and it is lined with beautiful black taffeta. I can make two dresses and a coat out of it."

"Hum-m," murmured the minister non-committally, gazing at the large black leaves on their purple background, and striving in his imperfect masculine way to picture to himself the small figure of Miss Philura panoplied in such a vesture.

"It was — er — very kind of Mrs. Van Duser to provide for the — " he began, in somewhat laboured fashion.

But Miss Philura interrupted him.

"Do you think it is pretty?" she demanded, her head on one side, an unsuspected ghost of a dimple peeping at him from one corner of her lips. "Does it look like me?"

Mr. Pettibone gazed tranquilly at Miss Philura. He thought her very sweet and

good, and he was glad she was coming to live in the desolate parsonage. Gladder, indeed, than he had ever hoped to be in his bereaved life.

"Does it?" repeated Miss Philura.

"How," inquired the minister, with his deep, wise smile, "could any sort of a gown look like you?"

He paused to survey once more Mrs. Van Duser's out-worn gown, so munificently bestowed upon the dearest little woman in the world. Then he smote his knee with a convincing gesture.

"Certainly not!" he said decidedly. "By no means. It is too — er — dark and — heavy, and — no; I don't like it."

He looked appealingly at Miss Philura. What did she want him to say, he wondered. And had he blundered into the wrong thing.

"I confess my opinion in matters of woman's dress is of very little value," he began apologetically. "Perhaps now — "

"Do you know," she said, "that is *exactly* what I thought about it"

Miss Philura had dropped her shining scissors in her lap.

"Do you know," she said, with the air of one who has just made a delightful discovery, "that is *exactly* what I thought about it. I couldn't bear black and purple for a wedding dress; though I dare say I shan't mind wearing it to church and Ladies' Aid — afterward."

She blushed a delicious maidenly blush under his observant eyes. Then she leaned forward and touched his hand.

"I want to ask you," she said breathlessly. "Do you think God — is — is— interested in clothes?"

III

Mr. Pettibone gazed at Miss Philura in puzzled silence for the space of a minute. The under shepherd of the Innisfield Presbyterian church, as Mrs. Van Duser had once called him, was not blessed with a very keen sense of humour. He strove unsuccessfully to imagine the theological concept of deity to which he had been taught to pray in carefully constructed sentences, as interested in the black and purple brocade.

He shook his head. Then he took Miss Philura's toil-worn hand is his own and patted it gently.

"Do I think — God — is interested in — clothes?" he repeated. "Why — er — really —"

Somehow or other a certain pregnant saying concerning a mill-stone and the

deep sea flashed across his troubled mind.

"Our Lord in his various discourses certainly mentioned garments — ah — more than once," he went on presently.

Miss Philura's blue eyes sparkled.

"I knew you'd say so!" she murmured happily.

"The wedding garment in the parable," pursued the minister, referring to his mental concordance of Scripture texts. "The — ah — robe of state which was brought forth for the returned prodigal, and—"

"The lilies of the field," suggested Miss Philura timidly. "Jesus said that 'even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these.'"

She glanced sidewise at the chrysanthemums which glistened in their bridal snows beneath the yellow light of the lamp.

"True," said the minister.

He gazed thoughtfully at the rather shabby clothes he was wearing. They

were his "preaching clothes" of three years before last. Mr. Pettibone always wore "preaching clothes" of different degrees of shabbiness, for the very good reason that he could afford no others. He even wore a very ancient and disreputable long-tailed frock-coat and black trousers dating back into obscurity, when working about the garden and in the cellar. He called these garments "his working togs" and wore them cheerfully, but down deep in some half smothered bit of consciousness lurked a carnal weakness for masculine purple and fine linen. He had once met an eminent Boston divine clad in a worldly suit of tweeds, enlivened still further by a cravat of deep red. Mr. Pettibone attired as usual in his third best preaching clothes (devoted to pastoral calls and other week-day duties) was conscious of an almost sinful admiration of Dr. Bentley's spruce person, though he

told himself that he could never approve worldliness and the appearance of pomp and fashion in "a man of God."

That expression "a man of God," had taken great hold upon Silas Pettibone, from his youth up. Almost unconsciously he had pictured this ideal personage as solemnly and decorously attired in more or less rusty black of the long-tailed variety.

"True," said the minister, after mentally reviewing his wardrobe filled with graded suits of ministerial cut. Then he sighed.

"Solomon in all his glory must have had some splendid clothes," continued Miss Philura, taking up her scissors again to attack a long seam of the black and purple dress. "Red, maybe, and pink and blue and — and white."

Her brown head drooped over the sombre stuff she was ripping. She did not

even glance at Mr. Pettibone's third best preaching suit.

"And Jesus said," went on the hestitating, sweet voice, "He *said*, 'how much more shall he clothe you.'"

"'Oh, ye of little faith,'" added the minister, finishing the quotation almost mechanically and from force of habit.

"And that *must* mean that if we only had faith enough God would give us all the clothes we needed," cried Miss Philura jubilantly.

"Er — quite possibly," admitted the minister.

"Prettier clothes than Solomon's," persisted Miss Philura, casting a black and purple strip upon the floor; "because, you know, lilies of the field are more beautiful than silk or satin."

"And so," inferred the minister logically, "you don't intend to wear a dress of this — ah — material on the occasion of our marriage?"

And he waved a rhetorical hand toward the crumpled heap to which Mrs. J. Mortimer Van Duser's erstwhile robe of state had become reduced.

Miss Philura looked up at him shyly. He was smiling at her almost humorously.

"Oh, no," she said, with the girlish blush he had noticed before flitting across her face.

"And what then is the wedding garment to be?" pursued the minister, "if I am not overstepping the bounds to inquire."

She paused, hesitated, then bent toward him almost beseechingly.

"You don't think I'm too — too old to wear white?"

"Too old?" repeated the minister wonderingly.

It was impossible to think of little Miss Philura as of anything which the passing years had used unkindly.

"You are not too old," he said with

decision, "to wear any beautiful robe, and you never will be."

"Electa Pratt will say I am," murmured Miss Philura, with a suppressed sigh, "and so, I'm afraid, will everybody else. But — if *you* don't think so —"

"I shall love to see you in a white dress," he assured her quietly. "It will be," he added firmly, "entirely suitable and becoming."

IV

"Out of the mouths of babes," quoted the Rev. Silas Pettibone to himself as he walked home beneath the mild radiance of the stars. He was referring to Miss Philura, "a babe in Christ," as he scripturally termed her. Surely no grown man or woman of his acquaintance possessed so rare and simple a faith.

"Miss Philura," he told himself with a pleasant feeling of warmth about a heart chilled with loneliness and his own stern concepts of the dealings of what he was pleased to term "Divine Providence," "Miss Philura is — ah — one woman in ten thousand,— er — and altogether lovely."

Mr. Pettibone found himself thinking of Miss Philura's wedding gown with pardonable enthusiasm. He was glad it was

to be white. White, he told himself, was the one proper garb for so fair, so pure, so sweet a woman. Angels wore white continuously, he had been led to believe.

Then, quite simply and gravely — even in his thoughts this good man was always simple and grave — he thought of his dead wife. She had been gone from him many years, and a wreath of memories lay against the closed door in his heart which bore the name Mary. It was another life he looked back upon from this crest of the years. He saw himself as he had been in those first years of his ministry. And Mary — ? No, he had not forgotten; he could never forget. But the road was long and very, very lonely. Surely she would not grudge him the solace of companionship — she who was safe folded behind the jasper walls of a distant paradise.

The parsonage gate clanged behind him; Deacon Scrimger's dog barked vocif-

erously from his kennel. The minister, pausing upon his own door-step, looked up into the sky, sparkling with stars between the leafless branches of the elms.

"I hope I'm doing right," he murmured humbly. "We're both alone, you know."

In the bright light of morning, streaming through the windows of his study, the Rev. Silas Pettibone changed the subject of his evening discourse to "The State of the Saved after Death." His morning sermon on "Sanctification by Faith," took on a practical turn, which astonished the members of his congregation.

Miss Philura, still pilloried in the singers' seat behind the pulpit, listened with a secret rapture which she was not altogether successful in hiding. She could not help hearing the stealthy rustle of Electa Pratt's taffeta petticoat beside her. It was a disapproving rustle, she felt, so was the lavish display of highly scented

pocket-handkerchief, with which Miss Pratt chafed the tip of her reddened nose. Electa's nose always reddened when she was angry, like the wattles of a turkey.

"Sounds to me like *Christian Science*," was Miss Pratt's biting comment, as the two ladies descended from the choir loft. "The *i-de-a* of tellin' about a man's askin' the Lord for a barrel o' potatoes! You needn't tell me you haven't been tryin' to fill him up with the stuff you heard in Boston."

"It's in the Bible," said Miss Philura tremulously.

"Philura Rice! You know very well the word potato isn't in the Bible at all. How dare you say such a thing?"

"I didn't mean potatoes — I meant faith. That's in the Bible, and it's for — for potatoes, or — anything people need."

"Yes, 'n' feathers 'n' clo'es 'n' engagement rings, maybe," scoffed Miss

Pratt, who had of late observed the glitter of a modest ring on Miss Philura's finger.

"Good-morning, Electa; good-morning, Philura," intoned a majestic voice. "Are you discussing the sermon? It will bear discussion, it seems to me."

Miss Philura glanced up into the forbidding eyes of the tall, massive lady, who had joined them at the foot of the stair.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Buckthorn," she said weakly.

"Yes, what *did* you think of it?" chimed in Miss Pratt. "I was just telling Philura I thought it sounded like Christian Science. But of course Philura —"

"Oh, I *trust* not," exclaimed Mrs. Buckthorn, wagging her head, which was surmounted by a lofty structure of black and white, pinnacled by a tuft of dispirited looking feathers. She had the air of one who successfully denies the world, the flesh and the devil.

"Christian Science, my dear Electa, is neither Christian nor Scientific, as I have always said. Really, it frightens me to hear you mention it in connection with our pastor. No — no!"

Mrs. Buckthorn shook her head, with closed eyes.

Presently she opened them with a snap.

"I was grieved to hear that you've been drawed away from the truth of late, Philura."

Miss Philura's lips parted, but she did not speak. Instead she glanced reproachfully at Electa Pratt.

"You've been in my Sabbath School class for more than ten years, Philura," pursued Mrs. Buckthorn, "an' I'm sure you never learned to pray for silk petticoats from *me*."

"No," admitted Miss Philura, "I never did."

"I've invited the minister to dinner today, for the express purpose of holding

holy converse on the subject of this morning's sermon," Mrs. Buckthorn said mournfully. "We should not forget that there is a great gulf fixed between the church and the world. I shall pray for you, Philura."

"Thank — you," murmured Miss Philura, in a small, faint voice.

"'Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth,'" quoted Mrs. Buckthorn sourly. "I fear you have not been under the rod of late, judging from what I hear."

The lady closed her eyes, and drew a sibilant sigh from the depths of her being.

"Pilgrims in this vale of tears should not indulge in pleasure," she said in a hollow voice, "nor follow the foolish and fleeting fashions of worldlings."

Miss Philura could not help noticing that Mrs. Buckthorn's silk gown, while cut after a fashion entirely unbecoming to her stout figure, made undoubted concessions to the prevailing mode.

"What do you propose to be married in?" inquired Mrs. Buckthorn in a hollow tone.

"My wedding dress is to be white," said Miss Philura almost defiantly.

"White?" echoed Mrs. Buckthorn in an unbelieving tone. "Surely, *not* white."

"White!" cried Miss Electa Pratt. "Well, I declare!"

Then she giggled disagreeably.

"I s'pose you'll wear a veil an' carry a shower bouquet?"

Miss Philura reflected a moment.

"No, I think not," she said calmly. "I shall wear chrysanthemums — white ones."

Mrs. Buckthorn shook her head.

"Think better of it, Philura," she advised compassionately. "At your time of life —"

"Yes, an' marryin' a widower at that!" shrilled Miss Electa. "My, I wouldn't

think of such a thing for a moment!"

"A nice drab alapaca," said Mrs. Buckthorn antiphonally.

"Trimmed with bias folds," added Miss Pratt.

Mrs. Buckthorn nodded approval.

"Bias folds are always in good taste. You will be *glad* you took my advice *later on*."

Whereat Miss Electa laughed aloud, and Mrs. Buckthorn looked shocked.

"You should remember where you *are*, my dear Electa," she chided.

"Philura never takes anybody's advice," sniffed Miss Pratt. "I had t' laugh at the very *idea!*"

"Then she'll never do for a minister's wife," was Mrs. Buckthorn's well-founded opinion.

But Miss Philura had drawn her skirts away from the rain-washed steps and was literally fleeing from the wrath to come.

That afternoon when the Rev. Mr. Pettibone had with difficulty escaped from the heart to heart conversation which followed what was known as "our Sabbath repast" in the Buckthorn family, and which invariably consisted of cold roast mutton and pallid pie, flanked by pickles of an exceedingly acid sort, the reverend gentleman was in a particularly thoughtful frame of mind.

It had been borne in upon him that in marrying Miss Philura he was not merely securing to himself a help-meet to companion his solitude, but also — and more particularly — he was providing his parish with that useful, indeed almost indispensable adjunct, a minister's wife.

"We've been hoping that you'd marry again, Mr. Pettibone," said Mrs. Buckthorn majestically; "but I confess that I was never more *surprised* than when I heard of your engagement to *Philura Rice.*"

"Hm — m," murmured the minister noncommittally.

"If it had been Electa Pratt, now,— she's such a capable person — or the Widow Green. She's very pious, and could lead the female prayer meetings; but Philura — As I told Mr. Buckthorn, you could have knocked me over with a feather!"

This, in view of Mrs. Buckthorn's massive proportions, was a forceful statement. The minister showed his appreciation of it by moving uneasily in his chair, and by the quick nervous gesture with which he rumpled his iron grey hair.

"Ah — um, really," he murmured vaguely.

Then, as Mrs. Buckthorn still regarded him fixedly, in obvious expectation of a reply, he expressed himself in handsome terms as being grateful for his parishioner's kind interest in his welfare.

"But — ah — I think you will find the

future Mrs. Pettibone quite equal to any duties which may fall to her lot," he concluded forcefully.

Mrs. Buckthorn *hoped so*, with the air and manner of a person who expresses belief in the millennium.

It was shortly after this that the minister had taken leave of his hostess, with a dignity and decision which admitted of no further conversation. Mrs. Buckthorn had, indeed, followed him quite to the verge of the threshold, intending to express her views on the subject of the wedding. But Mr. Pettibone had taken his hat from the rack, had put it on his head and was half way down the front walk before the excellent lady had time to more than mention the all-important subject of Miss Philura's wedding dress, which burned for eloquent utterance.

"Yes — yes, indeed," the minister had said hastily, "*Verbum sap.*, you know! Thank you very much. Good-bye!"

"What on earth did he mean by mentioning sap to me, I'd like to know," Mrs. Buckthorn inquired acidly of her spouse, who was, as might have been expected, a small, meek, generally voiceless person.

"Sap?" echoed Mr. Buckthorn, blinking pacifically at his consort. "Sap? Well now, I've heard of such a thing as a sap-head; mebbe he meant — "

"Benjamin Buckthorn," intoned the lady, "do you suppose for a minute that *any man* would dare to apply such an epithet to *me?* "

"No — no — no, Lizzie, 'course not. I only started t' say —"

But Mr. Buckthorn rarely finished what he had to say. He did not on this occasion, for usual and entirely sufficient reasons.

Mr. Pettibone, by now arrived at the parsonage, did not at once apply himself to meditations suited to the further development of his evening's discourse. In-

stead he walked about the ministerial domicile, gazing at all that he saw with unaccustomed eyes. His recent conversation with Miss Philura on the subject of the wedding dress, added to Mrs. Buckthorn's pungent remarks of the afternoon, had served to bring the fact of his approaching nuptials very clearly before Mr. Pettibone's mind. It had seemed a very simple and natural arrangement to the minister. Two lonely persons living heretofore under two roofs would henceforth dwell under one, to the great comfort and mutual advantage of the lonely persons. It was apparent, even to the minister, that to Miss Philura the change was to be a very grave one. She would be ruthlessly uprooted from the quiet nook where she had dwelt as unobserved as a violet under a leaf, and set in the full glare of a public opinion more pitiless and scorching than the fiery eye of the sun in mid-summer. He wondered if Miss

Philura realised this, as he was beginning to do. He wondered, too, if he would be able to shelter her from the harsh criticisms which he foresaw would fall to her lot; could he solace her bruised spirit; was it, in short, going to be worth while for Miss Philura?

The minister was a modest man, and quite unaware as yet of the real state of Miss Philura's sentiments toward himself, so he passed a very bad quarter of an hour, during which he arraigned himself severely for a variety of misdeeds and short-comings, chief among which was his own carnal selfishness in venturing to covet Miss Philura's affections and the solace of her companionship.

Such meditations are apt to be short-lived with the most altruistic of mankind. In the end the Rev. Silas Pettibone, by a series of logical arguments, had succeeded in convincing himself of the truth: namely, that Miss Philura needed him, as much as

he needed her. Also, he metaphorically snapped his fingers in the general direction of Electa Pratt, the Widow Green — and Mrs. Deaconess Buckthorn. He, Silas Pettibone, was the pastor of the Innisfield Presbyterian Church, and he meant to perform the duties of his position in the future as in the past, with unswerving fidelity, not to say painful conscientiousness, *but* — and he smote the blotting pad on his study table with forensic force and suddenness — he was also a man, and entitled by all the primal prerogatives of his sex to select his own mate.

Mentally, he defied the Ladies' Aid Society, the Session of the church, the parish and the world at large, singly and collectively. He would wed Miss Philura, and defend her peace and happiness against all comers.

Having arrived at this soul-satisfying conclusion, the minister arose from his chair and again began pacing the floor.

What a wonderful little woman Miss Philura was (he always called her Miss Philura in his musings) and how illuminating were her interpretations of Scripture. Really, he had never adequately appreciated the matter of King Solomon's apparel. He allowed his mind to wander vaguely among the presumably gorgeous vestments of that long defunct monarch. Pink, she had specified, and red, and gold, and blue. Undoubtedly she was right, and he sighed as he recalled the many well-worn long-tailed frock coats, which constituted his own wardrobe.

Then, quite naturally, it would seem, he began to take dubious note of the condition of the room in which he had passed so many studious hours. It was, come to look at it, in the strong afternoon light, an exceedingly shabby place. The wall-paper, for example — Mr. Pettibone jerked the window-shades to the top of the casement with an impatient hand.

"Really," he murmured, "I didn't realise how dilapidated everything is."

He recalled now that Jane Stiles, his house-keeper, had drawn his attention to the roof of the back kitchen, which leaked all over her clean floor every time it rained, and to the lack of paint on the kitchen cupboards. He had mentioned the subject of necessary repairs on the parsonage to Elder Trimmer, the president of the board of trustees, and had been told that lack of funds would prevent any expenditures of the sort.

He had told Jane Stiles of this adverse decision, and she had sniffed a comprehensive disbelief.

"I guess they'll find their parsonage a-tumblin' about their years, if they leave it be long enough," was her unasked opinion.

Mr. Pettibone making a leisurely survey of the ministerial residence on this occasion was forced to concur in Miss

Stiles' verdict. The parsonage needed fresh paint, paper and plenishings.

Mr. Pettibone recalled once more Miss Philura's unquestioning faith in the All-encircling Good. Mr. Pettibone's God, while not afar off, had never appeared to him to be "closer than breathing; nearer than hands or feet." He thought of his God habitually as "inhabiting eternity," which he conceived to be a state very far removed from earthly life. It had appeared a species of irreligion to acquaint this exalted deity with any of the sordid details of one's pilgrimage through a vale of tears. The state of one's individual soul, and of the souls of the parish had lain heavy on Mr. Pettibone's heart. So had the condition of the heathen in foreign lands. He frequently besought his God with eloquence and fervour in behalf of the President of the United States and for all legislative bodies now convened; but it had not heretofore occurred to him to

mention before what he habitually alluded to as "the throne of Grace" the arrears in his salary, his pressing need of a new preaching suit, or the dilapidated condition of the parsonage.

He dropped into his study chair and opened his Bible.

"Ye have not because ye ask not," stared accusingly at him from the page.

V

Mr. George Trimmer, known on week days and in secular circles as the proprietor of Trimmer's Dry Goods Emporium, and on Sundays and prayer-meeting evenings as "our good brother, Elder Trimmer," was actively engaged in the Emporium on the Monday morning immediately ensuing. The business being ordinarily small, since most of the Innisfield ladies after the immemorial custom of suburbanites did their shopping in Boston, Mr. Trimmer employed but one assistant except at the holiday season, when the trade briskened.

In view of what Mr. Trimmer characterised as the Christmas rush he had engaged and was now duly instructing a new clerk. This young man had come from Boston, bringing excellent testimonials as

to his general good character and ability.

He was a very personable young fellow, and his alert good looks were set off by a smart business suit. He had said that his name was Milton Gregory; this Mr. Trimmer promptly shortened to "Milt," as being a more convenient form of address as well as marking the subordinate position of the fashionably dressed young man.

Mr. Trimmer was of two minds regarding his clerk. His general get-up put his employer's baggy old clothes to the blush, if such an expression may be applied to the worn and ancient garb affected by Mr. Trimmer on week days. On the other hand the smart young man would advertise his business and attract trade. There would be a general desire on the part of the young women of Innisfield to buy a yard of ribbon or a skein of embroidery silk, Mr. Trimmer shrewdly opined. But he intended, as he told himself, "to put

the dude's nose right down on the grindstone," and he was busy with this attractive program when the door of the shop opened and the Rev. Mr. Pettibone came in.

The preliminary greetings over, Mr. Pettibone entered at once upon the business which had brought him to the Trimmer Emporium.

He first purchased three pairs of black cotton socks with white feet, and a washable cravat of the sort he always wore. While Mr. Trimmer was wrapping up these purchases with his customary show of good will, which, after all, costs nothing and often helps trade, Mr. Pettibone cleared his throat rather nervously.

"— Er — I wanted to have a word with you, Brother Trimmer," he began.

"Certainly, certainly," permitted Brother Trimmer; but his mouth tightened.

"You may recall that I spoke to you

some weeks ago — ah — with regard to necessary repairs upon the parsonage."

"M-m-m," murmured Mr. Trimmer. "And I told you — "

"You said, as treasurer of the Board of Trustees, that there were no funds."

"Exactly," smiled Mr. Trimmer. "No funds."

He shook his head.

"Sorry; but it can't be helped, you see."

"That's precisely what I wish to inquire into. As you are aware, my salary is behind; and the arrears increase rather than diminish with each year. There is now something like five hundred dollars owing me."

"Oh, my, my! I hope not," deprecated Mr. Trimmer, looking past the minister out of the window. "Five hundred dollars sounds pretty big — eh?"

"It does to me," admitted the minister ruefully. "I haven't urged the matter

because I've been quite alone in the world, and my expenses are not large. But — "

Mr. Trimmer coughed deprecatingly.

"A thrifty wife is from the Lord," he misquoted. "She'll save you quite a bit of money in the long run. Miss Philura's economical; she's had to be."

The minister stiffened slightly.

"It was not to discuss my future household affairs that I came to see you," he said, "though I shall not attempt to deny that in view of my approaching marriage I must insist upon having all arrears of salary paid in full. And as for the parsonage — let me urge upon you the advisability of appointing a committee to look the property over. It is certainly false economy to permit the house to fall into complete ruin for lack of proper and necessary repairs."

The minister spoke with warmth; Brother Trimmer opposed his pastor's eager look and gesture with a stony calm.

"Insist?" he inquired with uplifted brows. "I believe you said — "

"I did say insist, and why not? Don't you insist, when people owe you money which they can but won't pay?"

Mr. Trimmer was secretly astonished by the vehemence of the minister's tone. Moreover, he considered heat and temper entirely unbecoming in a man of God, such as he conceived the Rev. Silas Pettibone to be.

"A minister of the Gospel," he said sourly, "will hardly apply the hard and fast rules of the business world to — er — the stipend he receives as a free-will offering from the church."

"But my salary isn't a free-will offering," contradicted Mr. Pettibone. "It is a regular stated amount, offered by the church and accepted by myself, when I became the pastor of this church. Do you think you can collect the amount due me by Saturday evening?"

Elder Trimmer could hardly believe his ears.

He shook his head, with a sniff of derision.

"It can't be done," he said with more sharpness than he was in the habit of using toward his cash customers. "No, indeed. Sorry, but it's impossible."

"With God all things are possible," quoted the minister with just a shade of significant emphasis on the introductory preposition.

Mr. Trimmer shifted from his left foot to his right; then back again. He was growing impatient.

"But not with man," he said dryly. "We ain't got the money. That's all there is about it."

But his eyes avoided the minister's gaze.

"Won't you try to get it?"

"You mean collect — eh? Couldn't do it; no, sir; not at this season of the year. Christmas, you know. Folks won't pay

up back pew-rents at Christmas. You couldn't expect it."

The minister slowly drew on his gloves and reached for his parcel.

"I've been to see Deacon Scrimger," he observed mildly.

Mr. Trimmer smiled his tight smile.

"I guess he didn't tell you nothing different?"

"No. And he said furthermore that if any effort was made to collect pledges and pew-rents people would go to the Methodist Church rather than pay up."

"I guess that's straight goods," agreed Mr. Trimmer appropriately.

"I also interviewed some of the ladies of the congregation — er — Mrs. Buckthorn and Miss Day and — "

"What'd *they* say?"

"They agreed with you in thinking the Christmas season a bad one for attempting to make any collections. Mrs. Buckthorn proposed giving a donation party

at the parsonage the Friday following the week of prayer."

"That might be done," approved Mr. Trimmer. "Brings the young folks together; provides a pleasant social occasion. I'll vote for that."

"But I won't," said the minister decidedly. "I don't approve of donations. I refuse absolutely. I told the ladies so."

"Well, then, I guess — !

"It is evident to me," the minister went on, ignoring Mr. Trimmer's obvious conclusion, "that this church is in a very bad way — a very bad way. It is in an insolvent condition, and its leading members and officers refuse to take proper steps to pay their honest debts. This I consider even more alarming than the debt itself. I shall take steps — "

"Er — What?" interjected Mr. Trimmer.

"I blame myself for permitting the Lord's business to fall into such con-

fusion," continued the minister earnestly. "I even conceived that I was doing you all a kindness in permitting my salary to go unpaid. I had thought of cancelling the debt, and thus contributing — to be exact — the sum of four hundred, ninety-seven dollars and fifty cents toward my own support."

"If you'd do that mebbe we c'd manage to paper the parlour an' fix the kitchen roof," suggested Mr. Trimmer. "We should appreciate it very much. Yes, indeed."

"But I'm not going to do it," the minister spoke sternly. "The Lord has shown me my duty. Unless half the amount due me is paid to me by Saturday night of this week, I shall be compelled to lay the matter before Presbytery. I shall also ask you to read a full report on Sunday, and immediately thereafter call a special meeting for prayer. 'Ye have not because ye ask not.' This church

must humble itself before God. It must beg forgiveness for its shortcomings. It must pay its debts."

Elder Trimmer's jaw fell.

"Wait till the week of prayer," he begged. "It would — er — hurt business. It would indeed, just at the Christmas season — "

"Man, man!" cried the minister, "have you forgotten what we celebrate at the Christmas season?"

Then, abruptly he turned and went out.

Mr. Trimmer roused from a state bordering on stupefaction to find his newly engaged clerk at his elbow.

"Say, but he's a hummer!" exclaimed the young man. "You'll have to get busy, Mr. Trimmer, or he'll show you up in great shape. If you don't mind, I'd like to subscribe my first month's salary to the fund."

"You ain't earned it yet," snapped Mr. Trimmer, "and there ain't no fund."

VI

Miss Malvina Bennett paused in the act of sweeping her front stoop to look about her. Miss Bennett's moments in the open air were few, because she was nearly always bending over her sewing near the draughty little window of the front room upstairs.

A damp snow had fallen during the night, clinging wherever it touched, so that the world at which Miss Bennett gazed with faded, lack-lustre eyes was curiously transformed. Every tree and bush appeared loaded with white blossoms and a pink sun struggling through a veil of light grey clouds shone faint and marvellous between the snowy branches.

"My!" murmured Miss Bennett. "It certainly is handsome!"

Then she pulled the little knitted shawl

closer about her head and shoulders and resumed her sweeping. A pile of unfinished garments awaited her busy needle, and she must not waste time in gazing at the winter miracle.

As she was bestowing a final flap upon the broom, preparatory to entering the house, she saw a small figure coming toward her across the vacant lot. The pink sun had climbed higher by now and the tall, jewelled weeds on each side of the narrow, deep-trodden path blazed with sudden splendour of blue and scarlet and fiery rose.

"I thought 'twas you, Philura," said Miss Bennett as the hurrying figure drew near. "My eyesight's gettin' s' poor lately I can't hardly see anybody at a distance."

"I want to look over your fashion books, Malvina," Miss Philura said, "and see if I can get some ideas."

"I've got all the December magazines,"

Miss Bennett told her eagerly. "Come right in an' I'll get 'em all out for you."

As they went upstairs together Miss Bennett said,

"I guess you've heard me speak of my sister-in-law's niece, Genevieve Parsons? Her folks live in Boston; she's a sweet, pretty girl, and a real neat sewer. She's stayin' with me for awhile."

She threw open the door of the sewing room and Miss Philura saw a young girl seated by the window, her blond head drooped over the unfinished garment in her lap.

"Fer goodness' sake, Genevieve," ejaculated Miss Bennett, "you ain't tryin' to put them milliner's folds on that waist of Miss Day's, are you? I wouldn't das' t' trust the Angel Gabriel with them folds, an' Miss Day that fussy an' pertic'lar."

Thus rebuked the girl meekly yielded the black waist.

"I thought you said I was to do it."

There was a dreary note in her young voice.

Miss Philura noticed that the girl's eyelids were slightly reddened, as if from recent tears. But she smiled pleasantly when Miss Bennett made them acquainted.

"Miss Philura's goin' t' marry the minister," explained Miss Bennett briskly. "An' she wants t' look over the fashion books."

The girl glanced at Miss Philura from under her long lashes. There was a naïve curiosity and wonderment in her brown eyes.

Why, she was asking herself with a kind of youthful arrogance, should anyone so small and faded as Miss Philura care about fashions? And how extraordinary to think she was going to be married.

The girl sighed deeply. She was tall and held herself stiffly, as if not quite over her surprise at finding her lovely head so far above her mother's.

"Here, Jennie, you c'n sew the hooks 'n' eyes on this waist," said Miss Bennett cheerfully. "Or, if you're tired settin' you c'n go down an' feed the hens. The' 's a plate o' scrapin's on th' kitchen table."

The girl went slowly out of the room, her head with its heavy plaits of pale brown hair drooped a little to one side.

Miss Philura looked up from the picture of a preposterously long limbed lady clad in a bewildering gown of black and purple.

"I've got some silk in these shades," she said rather vaguely. Then she added abruptly, "Is she sick?"

"Who? Genevieve? No; she ain't sick. But I dunno but what she will be, if she keeps worritin'. I'm keepin' her busy, an' that 'ad ought t' take her mind off, if anythin' will."

"Take her mind off?" repeated Miss Philura, gazing at the simpering counte-

nance of the lady in the picture, who looked as if she never had any mind to take off or put on.

"Genevieve's been crossed in love," said Miss Bennett in a sibilant whisper. "I don't mind tellin' you, Philura; but don't for goodness' sake let anybody else know. She's related t' the Peabodys an' th' Winthrops on her pa's side. He's been dead since she was little. But I c'n tell you she's jest 's proud 's anybody, an' when his folks objected, why she made up her mind she wouldn't marry him — not if he was a dook and askin' her on his bended knee. So she come here t' me."

Miss Bennett paused to listen, her head on one side.

"He don't know where she is," she finished triumphantly. "I tell you she's got spunk!"

Then the two looked at each other guiltily, at sound of her light step on the stair.

"Now this 'ere style 'd be real becomin'

t' you, Philura," Miss Bennett was saying, when Genevieve came in. "An' it's s' narrer an' skimpy it don't take no goods t' speak of."

"Oh, I've got plenty of goods," Miss Philura said, but she couldn't for the life of her help a compassionate glance in the direction of the girl.

"I've got a real stylish skirt pattern," pursued the dressmaker; "you c'n take it jus' 's well 's not, 'tain't no work at all. I'll pin it on t' you t' see how much it'll want takin' in."

"Thank you, Malvina," Miss Philura said gratefully.

But she was thinking with almost painful sympathy of the tall, pale girl who by this time was sewing hooks and eyes down the back of a maroon coloured waist of ample proportions.

"Don't put 'em more 'n half an inch apart, Jennie," cautioned Miss Bennett, with her mouth full of pins. "That's

Mis' Buckthorn's waist, an' she's s' fleshy you have t' be extry careful with plackets an' openin's of all sorts. For all she's s' holy she's awful hard t' suit. I mos' died over the set o' that waist. She wanted t' look slim like the picture.

"'Mis' Buckthorn,' I sez, 'the Lord didn't make you up that way,' 'n' she tol' me I wasn't t' take the name of the Lord my God in vain. 'We're frail children of dust,' she says, reprovin' like.

"'Frail?' I sez, an' teeheed right out. An' Genevieve she laughed too. But Mis' Buckthorn said she'd pray for me. She always says that when she wants to set down hard on anybody. An' I will say it takes the tuck right out o' me every time. The's somethin' about the idea that goes agin the grain. An' yet I don't s'pose it'd do any *real harm*."

Miss Bennett stood up to observe Miss Philura's small person invested with the brown paper pattern.

"There!" she exclaimed, "that'll be real pretty on you. Ef you was only a mite taller now; but as I tol' Mis' Buckthorn, we can't b' thinkin' change one cubic. Now I'll jes' trace off that pattern. 'Twon't take a minute."

When the two women went downstairs Genevieve Parsons let two big tears splash on the front of Mrs. Buckthorn's maroon-coloured waist. Her young heart was in a tumult of rebellion against the dull pattern of her life,— how she hated the jargon of the dress-making shop: pins, pipings, patterns, plackets; the everlasting taking in and letting out. The painful strivings after beauty by the hopelessly ugly; the small mean economies; the endless monotony of the narrow treadmill between the sewing-machine and the chair by the window.

Her mother, an excellent but wholly unimaginative person, had chosen Genevieve's career for her when she was a little girl,

sewing dolls' frocks. She was to take a course in dress-making when she had graduated from the high school. They were poor, and the girl had always thought of herself as earning money. She had even looked forward to the time when she should have a shop of her own. This had been the pinnacle of Mrs. Parson's ambition for her, and the girl had accepted it without question. Then she had met *him*, and everything was changed.

All had been just as her mother had planned it up to that point. Genevieve had graduated in a white muslin gown of her own making. Then she had gone to the Art School and learned dress-making in a course of twenty lessons. After that she sewed for Miss Popham, who sometimes went out by the day, with an assistant, to make gowns for people who imported their best things from Paris.

This was an exceptional opportunity, Miss Popham impressed upon the girl, of

whom she demanded the maximum of work at the minimum of wages. But Genevieve was satisfied. In these great dull houses one generally worked in the third story back room, and ate a meagre lunch brought up on a tray by a supercilious maid; but there were occasional glimpses to be had of the unknown world, snatches of music, bits of conversation. Even the fittings, conducted by Miss Popham in the state bedroom below stairs, where Genevieve was sometimes called to assist — even on these occasions when she played the part of an animated pin-cushion, there was food for the imagination.

It was a rainy night in December when the psychological instant had arrived, quite unexpectedly. Only the girl never referred to it as pyschological; she only thought of it as "the first time I saw him."

Miss Popham had just completed a masterly copy of a Paris gown (at a fifth of

its cost) and was crawling about the floor on her hands and knees, intent on the "hang" of the skirt on the majestic person of her employer. Genevieve was handing pins, as usual, when the door opened and a young man came in. He had apparently just arrived from somewhere, for he carried a suit-case and umbrella.

"Hello, mother," he said with boyish eagerness. Then he planted a kiss on the lady's plump florid cheek.

"Oh, my dear!" protested the matron. "Don't you see I'm having a fitting?"

"You're always having something," grumbled the boy. "Last time I came home it was a reception, and the time before that —"

"You had best dress for dinner," his mother interrupted coldly, "and, pray, give Rogers your bag when you come in."

The intruder turned, his ruddy good looks clouded by a frown. He muttered

something under his breath, and then — Genevieve Parsons drew a sharp breath, — and then it just happened that he glanced about the room and chanced to see her,— it was the merest chance, of course; but it was strangely like the meeting of old friends.

She was sure she didn't know how it ever came about; but in less than a month he had managed to convince Genevieve's mother that he was a "real nice young man." Beyond that Mrs. Parsons, for one, was never known to go. He drank tea with them on Sunday nights, and praised Mrs. Parson's biscuit and raspberry jam, which he said was the best he ever ate. Once he invited Genevieve to go with him to a foot-ball game; she wore her prettiest clothes, which by this time had taken on an air quite Parisienne, carried a Harvard flag, and was as happy as a girl may be at the great spectacle of youth. The crowds, the shouting and the victory for

the Crimson warmed her somewhat cold and timid beauty into a loveliness so striking that numbers of his college friends crowded about eager to be introduced to the pretty Boston girl.

That night he told her that he loved her, quite simply and boyishly, and she had allowed him to kiss her. He would graduate in June, he said, and they would be married directly afterward.

Well, it was November now and they were parted — for ever, she told herself. It was his mother, as anyone but a little goose like Genevieve might have expected. She actually came to see Genevieve, in her limousine, attended by a footman in buttons, and wearing one of Miss Popham's French gowns.

The Parsons lived in a very small, very shabby little house, one of a long row of shabby little houses, all drearily alike, and very far removed from Beacon Street. It was quite the proper environment for " the

masses" (since they were to be found there in such numbers), but it had not up to the present moment occurred to Genevieve Parsons that she was a part of that great general division of humanity. His mother was very kind. She did not, as she might have done, reproach Genevieve. There was something so piteous, so despairing in the young face, that even the great lady in the Popham French gown was touched by it. But she made her understand how impossible — how utterly, entirely, absurdly impossible it all was.

She spoke of her son as that foolish boy, and reproached herself for neglecting him.

When Mrs. Parsons had attempted to interfere with strident protests to the effect that she guessed her Genevieve was "just as good as anybody else," adding further relevant information pertaining to the Peabody and Winthrop connection, the great lady had merely stared at her

through her lorgnette, with a perfectly appropriate remark which appeared to cut the interview off short, like a length of ribbon under a pair of sharp scissors.

Thereupon she had swept out to her limousine; the door had been neatly shut by the footman in buttons; and the whole shining vision had disappeared in a cloud of East Boston dust, which hung dispiritedly in the air before settling on the grimy little houses.

She saw him once more to say good-bye. He had protested hotly, vainly. He would be of age in a month. He would marry whom he chose. His mother had no right — not a vestige of a right to spoil his happiness. What did Genevieve care what anyone said, as long as he loved her?

But the Peabody and Winthrop pride was alive and dominant in this humble descendant.

"It breaks my heart," she had sobbed,

" but I p-promised your mother that I — I wouldn't —"

" You promised my mother? " he cried. " But you promised me first."

In the end he had gone away — only to come again the next day and the next. Then in despair the girl had sworn her mother to secrecy and taken flight to Malvina Bennett's upper front room, where it appeared she must remain for uncounted years, sewing on hooks and eyes and learning to lay milliner's folds.

VII

Below stairs Malvina Bennett was saying good-bye to her neighbour. They had been talking together for a matter of twenty minutes in the hall. Now Miss Philura had advanced as far as the front door. She laid her hand upon the knob.

"I must be going," she said, "I know you are very busy, Malvina."

"Yes; I be," responded the dressmaker, "— turrible busy, what with gettin' Mis' Buckthorn's waist done — she wants it to wear t' your weddin'. An' that reminds me, you ain't told me yet what you're goin' t' be married in."

"I'm going to be married in a white dress, Malvina," Miss Philura said, and a soft radiance overspread her face, as she remembered the chrysanthemums in the snow.

After a pause she added timidly,

"Mr. Pettibone likes white. He thinks white would be most becoming and — and suitable."

Almost breathlessly she waited for the dressmaker's verdict. It came without delay.

"I dunno's I should have thought of it, first off," mused Miss Bennett. "So many folks think of gettin' wear out of their weddin' dresses afterward. But seems t' me seein' mos' folks don't get married more'n three times at the outside, 's though they c'd afford a special dress. I know I should. 'N' I d'clare I'd be married in white, if I was a hundred,— anyway ef it was the first time. 'Course it don't matter about his bein' a widower."

Miss Philura turned the knob and opened the door.

"Did you git it ready-made?" inquired Miss Bennett, in an aggrieved voice. "I'd kind o' thought mebbe you'd let me make it for you, seein' we've been

neighbours s' many years, and you a-goin' t' marry the minister."

It had been on the tip of her tongue to say that she had made the first Mrs. Pettibone's shroud; but she thoughtfully forbore.

Miss Philura shook her head.

"No," she said, "I haven't bought the dress."

"Have you got the goods?"

"Not yet. I have the silk thread, though, and the button-hole twist. It's cream white."

"That's good. I don't like dead white, nor oyster white, neither. It looks kind o' cold an' dead t' me. Will you let me make it, Philura? I'd admire t' do it. An' I won' take a cent fer it."

Miss Philura's eyes shone with gratitude; a deep happiness filled her breast. The wedding-dress was still in the Encircling Good, but she had the silk thread, and Malvina would make it.

"You needn't bother about findin's either," pursued Miss Bennett eagerly. "I've got some real han'some paz'mentry, with pearl beads I saved off ma's weddin'-dress. It's the latest style now; 'n' I know just the prettiest way to make the skirt."

"How good you are, Malvina," murmured Miss Philura, joyously adding the white passementerie to the visible portion of the invisible wedding garment.

"Well, I guess I ain't forgot how good you was to me last winter when I was all crippled up with rheumatism. I'll come in the evenin' an' help you cut out the brocade you've got. An', say, wouldn't you like t' have Genevieve for a day or two t' help make it up? The change'd do her good."

"Well, I — I'd like it very much; only — "

"She wouldn't expect no pay from you. She's workin' fer me b' the month. An'

I'd like t' get rid of her fer a few days. It's awful worritin' t' hev anybody about that's been crossed in love. You c'n feel it all through your bones like an east wind."

Miss Philura thoughtfully closed the front door, through which a keen wind had begun to draw.

"I must be going," she said gently.

"Well, good-bye, Philura; I'll send Genevieve over early t'morrow."

Miss Philura was thinking about the girl as she went down the path to the front gate. She hoped she would talk to her about her unhappy love affair. In the All-encircling Good was happiness, she was sure, and balm for bruised spirits.

"There is an abundance of everything," she reminded herself, "— a lavish abundance of everything — for everybody!"

She drew a deep breath of ecstasy; the

blood danced through her veins bringing back her youth, which, after all, had never been lost, but only softly overlaid with years, like a chrysanthemum under the snow.

The butter-woman's wagon was tied in front of Miss Philura's door, and Huldah herself confronted her as she opened the gate.

"I didn't das t' leave anything on the stoop for fear of the cat," said the butter-woman, "so I clumb int' the kitchen window an' put the things on the table. Mind you eat 'em all. 'Tain't any too much if you expect t' get any fat ont' your bones b' Thanksgivin'."

She gazed critically at Miss Philura, her head on one side.

"Seems t' me you're a mite fleshier than you was las' time I was here. Any way, you ain't near s' peaked-lookin' an' you've got a shine in your eyes —"

"It's because I'm so happy," said Miss

Philura truthfully. "Everybody is so good — so kind!"

The Encircling Good seemed very near. It shone in the bright dark eyes of the butter-woman. She had seen it in Malvina Bennett's worn face, when she had offered to make the wedding-dress.

"Did you mind what I said — 'n' eat up everythin' I brought you?" the butter-woman was inquiring.

Miss Philura blushed.

"I — I only took two or three fresh eggs to old Mrs. Davis; her hens have stopped laying; and a bit of the — only a small piece of the chicken to —"

The butter-woman laughed, a deep, mellow laugh.

"'Course you did," she said. "You couldn't no more help givin' things away 'an a bird c'n help singin'. I knew you would. You'll make a firstrate minister's wife; but I'll bet you'll never git real fat."

"I'm sure I hope not," said Miss Philura fervently.

The butter-woman was looking at her keenly.

"'Tain't but two weeks t' Thanksgivin'," she said slowly. "I remember once — a long time ago —"

Her voice trailed into silence. Then she shook herself, very much after the fashion of a big shaggy animal.

"It's kind o' wintry; ain't it?" she said loudly; "I like it though. An' my hens is layin' right along. I keep 'em warm an' give 'em plenty t' eat."

She started briskly forward.

"Did you ever see anythin' like that horse o' mine? Joshua, he c'n go t' sleep on two legs, kind o' kitty-cornered. D' you see?"

She climbed into her wagon.

"Good-bye!" she called out. "I'll be here next week."

Miss Philura went slowly into the

house, thinking of the butter-woman. She knew what it was to live alone — just to live, without any particular interest to enliven the dull monotony of the passing days. Now for her a door had opened suddenly into a wonderful garden, full of bright hued flowers. That is the way it looked to Miss Philura. She had never thought of the parsonage as an ugly, old-fashioned house, very much in need of fresh paint and paper, nor of the minister as a middle-aged widower. The parsonage was his home, and she was going to live there with him. She was to be permitted to love him, to cook for him, to mend his stockings and sew the buttons on his preaching clothes. This was happiness — joy, and it was only two weeks from Thursday. She wondered if the butter-woman was happy. From her own warm heart she sent a great wave of love after the strong, broad-shouldered figure perched on the seat of the jolting wagon,

already up the first steep slope of the hill behind the town.

The butter-woman was whistling through her closed teeth as she drove onward through the fairy world which was slowly coming back to its common, everyday aspect under the bright noonday. There was a subdued jingle of silver in the pocket of her stout woollen dress. A pound of coffee gave forth its subtle fragrance from the basket under the seat. She owed nothing to anyone in the world, and there was a slow-growing fund in the savings bank.

Huldah Johnson saw other people's lives from their back door-steps, on Tuesdays and Thursdays. She never asked questions nor spied curiously into the kitchens opened to her decisive knock, and yet her shrewd eyes saw much that the owners of the kitchens supposed to be concealed from the world. She knew who would haggle with her over the price of

her new-laid eggs, and the rolls of fresh butter. It was a pleasure which Huldah never denied herself to enter into heated argument with certain women, who nevertheless paid the hard silver into her hard palm when the petty strife was ended. Huldah demanded and got more for her farm products than the village stores asked for like commodities brought from a distance. It was little she knew concerning cold storage or preservatives, and she cared less. Her eggs were always fresh, her butter fragrant and her chickens plump and neatly dressed.

"If you don't want 'em at my price you don't have t' take 'em," was her final dictum.

Perhaps Huldah had grown a trifle hard and cynical during her solitary life; she had reasons. There were people even in Innisfield who never found fault with her prices, who were always ready to take what she had. But they would pay next

time,— or could she, perhaps, change a twenty dollar bill? Unexpectedly Huldah said "yes," on one such occasion. When the woman blushed, stammered, and finally said she had really forgotten, but that very morning her husband had borrowed the money until evening.

After fifteen years of observing life from Innisfield kitchen doors Huldah knew her narrow world far better than the minister, and quite as well as the butcher and the grocer, whose knowledge of human kind is sure to become wide and deep.

And so Huldah often whistled through her closed teeth as her patient old horse climbed the steep hill behind the town, while she thought over the experiences of the morning. There was always food for thought in what she had seen and heard. On the whole, Huldah was singularly content, as she turned her back upon the clustered houses, where people were getting ready to be married, were bringing

children into the world, or were dying — and continually struggling to pay what life cost them. It always appeared to cost cruelly, even at its beginning and end, when for the most part other people were obliged to pay.

It was lonely but peaceful up on the crest of the hill, and the weather-beaten little house seemed far removed from the toil and struggle of the valley. The furry and feathered creatures which furnished her livelihood lived tranquilly and died (when she so decreed it) without protest.

Huldah drove into her own yard, welcomed by the cackle of fowls and the joyous bark of a watchful collie. She put up her horse with the usual care, gave the fowls some grain, then unlocked the back door and entered the warm, silent kitchen. The kitchen in Huldah's house was large and two windows looked toward the south. There was a shining cook-stove, braided

mats on the yellow painted floor, where the sun lay in golden squares, and a calla lily unfolding its first white sheath amid leaves of brilliant green. On the back of the stove a brown earthenware tea-pot simmered in the heat. Huldah liked her tea brewed long and strong. She poured a cup of the steaming liquid and drank it clear; then she cut two thick slices of bread and a slab of cheese and sat down to warm her feet in the oven.

"I guess," she said aloud between bites of the bread and cheese, "that it's better as it is."

She had said this to herself many times before, and at last she had come to believe it.

"S'pose he'd come back," she went on, stroking the striped kitten that had jumped to her knee, intent upon the crumbs of cheese, "just s'posen he had, 'n' I'd 'a' married him. I might 'a' been dead long ago, with a baby in m' arms,

like that poor little thing they took me in t' see this morning. I might 'a', who knows. Or I might 'a' lived t' stan' b' his grave with a row of hungry children at my back, like Mrs. Peter Snell. Land! I guess I wasn't made fer it. It's a heap easier 's 'tis."

She stretched her broad, muscular hands to the heat of the stove and surveyed them intently.

"'The' ain't nothin' I can't do fer m'self," she said defiantly. "An' I ain't lonesome — not a mite. No, ma'am!"

She arose presently, shook the crumbs from her skirt, poked the fire noisily, then tramped across the floor to the window, her heavy shoes echoing loudly in the quiet house.

"I tell you I ain't lonesome," she muttered. "I don't want nothin' different from what it is. Why, land! I don't have no trouble compared with most folks. Look at 'em; then look at me. I'm strong

an' healthy, an' I've got money laid up an' — an' the' ain't nobody t' bother me!"

Then suddenly her strong features became convlused, and she beat the window sill with her fists.

"Oh, Tom — Tom!" she moaned. "It's an awful long time,— an' me all alone since father died."

She buried her face in her arms, and so was silent for a time, while a whining wind crept stealthily about the house, and the clock ticked solemnly from its corner.

Somewhere a great way off a cock crowed, announcing the hour of noon. It was echoed from Huldah's barnyard, twice, thrice. Then all was still once more, only the whining wind stole into the chimney and moaned there, like an imprisoned thing.

In the long look behind, which the butter-woman in the midst of her bustling activities had paused to take, she saw the self that had been and the self that might

have been. Then stepping softly, like one in the presence of the dead, she moved across the floor to where a battered chest stood against the wall. It had been painted a dull blue, and on its top worked out in brass headed nails was a device of crossed anchors and a name, Thomas Bowles.

She lifted the lid and looked in. Then one by one she took out the articles within and laid them on the floor beside the chest, a seaman's blouse, a huge shell, pink and white, like a baby's palm; other smaller shells, alive with the iridescent mystery of the sea; many-hued corals, a string of curious dark beads, exhaling the odour of spices.

All of these things the butter-woman removed; then crouched beside the chest she leaned her chin upon her rough, red hands and stared down at the one thing which remained therein. It was an oblong box of shining wood, inlaid with many-coloured

bits of shell in a design of flowers and leaves.

It had not grown old, she was thinking. It would never grow old. For an instant she saw it, as she had first seen it years before, through an aching blur of tears. Then she took it in her lap, and sitting flat on the floor opened it.

A faint odour of roses crept from the box and stole through the room, like a gentle ghost of the long ago. There were folds of tissue paper within. The woman touched them, her rough hands grown suddenly tremulous. Then she deliberately lifted the paper and gazed at what it hid — for a long minute.

VIII

When Mr. George Trimmer entered his store on the Wednesday morning immediately succeeding the Monday, on which his pastor had issued his bold ultimatum, he was obviously in a very bad temper. Mr. Adelbert Small, regularly employed in the Emporium for a matter of ten years back, knew the signs and cautiously retreated to his desk in the rear of the store, where during certain hours of each day he was engaged in the book-keeping end of the business.

Mr. Small was an undersized man, with what is known as a sandy complexion and rather watery blue eyes, rimmed with red — the red being a consequence of a too strenuous application to figures in the semi-darkness which prevailed in the rear of the Emporium. He had been talking with the new clerk when both men caught

sight of the spare, stoop-shouldered figure of their employer through the plate glass window at the front of the store. Mr. Trimmer was twenty minutes after his usual time, a fact which Adelbert Small had already commented upon.

"Gee!" murmured the experienced clerk, "there'll be a hot time in th' ol' town, if I ain't mistaken in the weather signs."

He climbed nimbly to his stool and was deep in figures when the door closed behind Mr. Trimmer.

"Good-morning, sir," said Milton Gregory, with perfect propriety of tone and manner.

There are occasions when a smiling politeness acts as a species of mental mustard plaster. It is a tacit rebuke to ruffled tempers, and suggests a certain smug superiority quite maddening to persons of an irritable disposition.

Mr. Trimmer merely growled as he

hung up his shabby overcoat and topped it with a shabbier hat.

"What you fellows been doin'?" he demanded, as he removed the arctic overshoes he wore at all seasons except midsummer. "We got t' do more business than we have so far this week, or I'll have t' discharge both of you."

Adelbert Small wriggled uneasily upon his stool. He had heard this threat many times before; but it never failed to arouse his apprehensions. Mr. Small was a family man, with a sickly wife and two children, "small by name and small all over," to quote their father's frequently uttered aphorism concerning them. Therefore his "job" as he called it, was of the utmost importance. He was in the habit of prefacing most of his modest plans with the words "If I don't lose my job," or "If I c'n hold down that job of mine awhile longer, I'll — " and so forth. This was very depressing to Mrs. Small, who de-

clared she suffered from an access of nervousness every Saturday afternoon, for fear Adelbert would come home without his job. As for the little Smalls, they frolicked, as it were, upon the brink of a jobless future.

Therefore it was that Adelbert blinked his watery eyes over the columns of figures he was adding, and nervously curled his toes behind the rung of his stool and was silent.

The new clerk, however, answered with great cheerfulness.

"Doing?" he echoed. "Why, we've swept the store, uncovered the stock, and I've arranged the windows, in the way I spoke of yesterday. Did you notice them, sir?"

Mr. Trimmer had noticed the windows, dressed in a manner which would have done credit to a city shop. But he merely grunted.

"I thought trade was pretty brisk,"

continued the young man, with admirable aplomb. "We had quite a run on handkerchiefs yesterday."

"Oh, we did — heh? An' you think trade is pretty brisk — huh? Well, you're a very smart young man — very smart an' knowin'. But you'll find yourself out of a job some o' these fine days along with your smartness. Then mebbe you'll set up in business for yourself. I guess you're a leetle too smart for me."

"Do you want me to leave to-day, sir?" inquired Milton Gregory, with what Mr. Trimmer set down as "an impident smile" at his employer. Then he glanced toward the corner where his own hat and coat were bestowed, with a purposeful air.

"When I want you t' quit I'll let you know," snapped Mr. Trimmer. "There's a customer comin' in. Git busy!"

It was Miss Philura Rice in quest of a spool of silk. She was quite intent upon

a scrap of brocade whose colour she wished to match, but when the young man came forward with his pleasant smile, she gazed at him with wide, uncomprehending eyes.

"Why — why! What —" she stammered.

"You are surprised to see me?" he inquired. "Don't you think it's time I went to work?"

"But — but —"

"Do you want purple or black?" asked the young man; he had taken the scrap of silk and was turning it over in his strong brown fingers with a smile.

"Purple, I think, a ten cent spool. When did you — come?"

"Last week," he said, holding a spool for her inspection. "Is that about right? I'm coming to call soon, if I may." He smiled down into her agitated face with great good humour.

"It was such a surprise," said Miss

Philura. "I'm sure I never — I never should have expected —"

She was fumbling in her purse and he could not help seeing how shabby and how nearly empty it was.

"You haven't told me whether I may come to see you," he reminded her, as he handed her the change from a quarter of a dollar.

"Oh, of course. I do hope you will. And I haven't inquired — is everyone quite well — your dear mother and —"

"I have heard nothing to the contrary," he told her, with what a more astute observer might have set down as a slight bitterness in his voice.

Then he smiled down at her reassuringly.

"I'm here on — er — business," he went on. "I'll be glad to explain when I see you. Might I come to-night?"

Miss Philura hesitated for the fraction of a minute; Mr. Pettibone was in the

habit of dropping in of a Wednesday evening. But she was determined not to be selfish.

"I shall be very glad to have you drink tea with me," she said with quaint cordiality.

"Here you, Milt!" called Mr. Trimmer, jerking his thumb in the direction of a new customer at the opposite counter.

"I'll come," he promised Miss Philura.

It was more than an hour thereafter before the stress of business again permitted a short conversation between Mr. Trimmer and his junior clerk.

"You don't want t' git int' general conversation with customers," said Mr. Trimmer sententiously. "It ain't what you're here for, Milt, and I want you should paste it in your hat. Let the women folks do th' talkin' an' you ten' stric'ly t' biz. That's my way, an' I ain't

goin' t' hev no other in this 'ere store. You understan'? "

Young Milton Gregory stooped and picked up a scrap of paper from the floor. He glanced at it carelessly, then tucked it into his pocket.

"I think you make it — er — sufficiently clear," he replied.

"Excuse me, sir," interrupted Mr. Adelbert Small, with an apologetic cough, "but I haven't had the opportunity before. When I opened the store this morning I found this — ah — under the door."

Mr. Trimmer eyed the large square envelope, which Mr. Small handed him. It bore his own name in small distinct characters, and the flap was fastened with a large Christmas seal displaying the words "Peace on Earth, Good-will to men."

"Kind o' early in the season for that sort of thing, I thought," observed Mr. Small with a feeble attempt at a laugh.

Mr. Trimmer with great deliberation

bestowed the envelope in his pocket. He thought he detected an undue curiosity on the faces of his employees.

"Git back to them books, Dell," he bade his accountant; "an' you, Milt, put some coal in the furnace."

Left to himself he opened the envelope. It contained several crisp bank bills folded inside a single sheet which bore the words: "For the minister's back pay. Better get busy. A reporter from *The Boston Hub* will be present at the service on Sunday next."

"Huh!" exclaimed Mr. Trimmer. "I'd like t' know who in creation —"

He paused to count the bills. Then he blinked, cleared his throat, and turned the envelope over.

"Peace on Earth — heh?" Yet there had been a distinct threat conveyed to his mind by the brief words of the unknown person who was interested in the minister's back pay.

He was decidedly glad, on the whole, when the door opened to admit the figure of the senior deacon of the church, who was also a member of the board of trustees.

"Mornin', George," began the deacon, rubbing the dampness from the end of his nose with the back of his mittened hand.

"Good mornin', deacon," responded Mr. Trimmer.

He was still holding the square envelope with its enclosure.

Deacon Scrimger's sharp old eyes detected the roll of yellow-backed green paper in Mr. Trimmer's hand.

"Collections good — heh," commented the deacon.

He removed his striped mittens, rolled them up and stuffed them into his bulging pocket. Then he produced an ancient and hard worked bandana handkerchief and blew a bugle blast.

"The' 's' nothin' like cold cash t' ile

th' wheels o' trade," he observed oracularly.

Mr. Trimmer all unconsciously had divested himself of the calculating merchant. He was now Elder Trimmer, solemn and sanctified.

"I have just received a goodly contribution to the pastor's salary," he said, in his best prayer-meeting manner. "The Lord is on our side!"

"Y' don't say?" cried the deacon, wagging his aquiline old face from side to side. "Who donated it?"

"It's anonymous," Mr. Trimmer told him. "Some good brother doubtless —" He stole a second glance at the handwriting on the single page — "or consecrated sister."

He coughed as if in church.

"Or sister," he repeated, "who has chosen to heed our Lord's command in keeping the right hand in — er — ignorance of what the left hand hath — ah —

pufformed. It is, in short, fifty dollars. An' thus encouraged, I feel —"

"Hallelujah!" cried the deacon. "Mebbe the pastor 'll let us off at that. We don't want no publicity in our church affairs. I was talkin' with m' wife an' Sister Buckthorn yist'day, an' the Ladies' Aid 'll contribute twenty-five dollars. They'll take it out their missionary fund."

"It seems wrong t' deprive the heathen —" began Mr. Trimmer.

"But th' Meth'dists 'll git one on us, ef the matter 's took t' Presb'tery," interrupted Deacon Scrimger. "I hear the 's a good deal o' talk a' ready."

"I regret that our pastor should have taken such a stand at this time," murmured Mr. Trimmer.

"I s'pose we kin git rid of him, an' git a younger man," suggested Deacon Scrimger briskly. "A young man draws better 'n a man o' his age."

Mr. Trimmer was not without certain

graces of character, though these were often in eclipse. He glanced sharply from the letter in his hand to the face of his colleague.

"We'd have to pay up just the same," he said coldly. "'N' I don't want any whipper-snapper in the pulpit. We'll have t' get busy."

Mr. Trimmer did not, either then or later, show the anonymous communication which had accompanied the gift of fifty dollars. But the thought of the reporter from *The Boston Hub* remained with him. As treasurer of the board of trustees it would devolve upon himself to make a financial statement. That report should reflect credit upon Innisfield, he was determined, and incidentally upon that pious person, Elder George Trimmer.

IX

Miss Philura hurried home after her brief interview with Mr. Trimmer's new clerk in a troubled, agitated state of mind.

"Now what," she asked herself, "can have happened to Gregory?"

Not being able to answer this query, she harked back to the once absorbing occupation of thinking about her own duty, as related to that personable young man, at the present moment engaged in measuring off one and three-quarters yards of green ribbon for Miss Electa Pratt, who had entered the Emporium just as Miss Philura Rice had left it.

Miss Pratt had observed Miss Philura's agitation, but had attributed it to a widely different reason.

She was herself bursting with a piece of information, which had only just

reached her after a circuitous route through the town.

"You ain't lived here long, have you?" she interrogated the young man, who was wrapping up her purchase.

She thought he strongly resembled a picture she had seen in an advertisement of ready-made clothes; he had the same clean-shaven, square jaw, straight nose, and tall, well-made figure. Miss Electa smiled into his grey eyes as she asked the question.

"No; I haven't," he said briefly.

"Then you ain't heard about the minister?"

"The minister?" he repeated.

"Yes; Mr. Pettibone. He was a-goin' t' git married Thanksgivin' day. But I guess mebbe it won't come off quite s' soon after all."

"Why not?" inquired Mr. Trimmer's clerk, with some sharpness. There had been a note of joy in the lady's voice,

which she had made no attempt to disguise.

"The's strong feelin' in the community that he'd better resign, an' I guess he's goin' to. But o' course you wouldn't be interested, seein' you're a stranger amongst us."

Miss Pratt sniffed, as she bestowed her parcel in the netted bag she carried. Then she bowed genteelly to Mr. Trimmer.

"I was going to stop at your house this noon to ask if you couldn't make it convenient to pay your pew-rent," said that gentleman, motioning his clerk to retire.

"My pew-rent?" cried Miss Pratt. "Don't I set in the singers' seat, I'd like to know? An' ma ain't been t' church for more'n a year."

"If you don't want the seat any longer, give it up," advised Mr. Trimmer. "But we've got to raise some money, and you're

on our books for twenty-five dollars."

"Well, when we get our new pastor, I'll speak t' ma about it," purred Miss Electa. "But we'll be candidatin' fer a spell, I s'pose."

"What do you mean?" demanded Mr. Trimmer, with considerable acerbity.

Miss Pratt displayed some excitement.

"It come t' me straight 's a string — Mis' Deaconess Buckthorn told Abby Whiton that Mis' Scrimger told her that the Deacon said —"

"The deacon was in here not ten minutes ago."

"Didn't he say we was goin' t' have a new pastor?"

"Not to me; no, ma'am."

"An' didn't you tell your wife —"

Mr. Trimmer suddenly divested himself of his churchly manner for one thoroughly domestic.

"Oh, drat the women!" was what he muttered under his breath.

And all this time Miss Philura was wondering whether biscuit and cold boiled eggs cut into rounds and peach preserves with jelly-roll would satisfy the appetite of the young gentleman who was going to drink tea with her that evening. He looked very hearty, she told herself, with certain misgivings.

But she had been reckless in her use of the chicken the butter-woman had left on the occasion of her last visit. Genevieve Parsons had been helping make the black and purple brocade, and Miss Philura had set what she privately considered a lavish repast before the young person each day.

Miss Parsons might be crossed in love, but she brought a healthy young appetite to her meals, She had not said anything about her sorrow to Miss Philura, although that lady was eagerly sympathetic.

The girl sat by the window putting the

final touches on the brocade waist when Miss Philura hurried in, quite out of breath.

"I was never so surprised!" she declared.

The girl by the window fixed her brown eyes on the agitated face. Her sorrow had quite evidently got the better of her during Miss Philura's absence, for her eye-lids were pink and a stray drop twinkled on the long curling lashes.

"You poor darling," cried Miss Philura, "I feel almost wicked to be so happy, when you — But you know, dear, he is perfectly safe in the Encircling Good, and your own must come to you. Oh, and I hope you won't mind my saying it; but it slipped out before I thought."

The girl gazed almost defiantly at her would-be comforter.

"I see Cousin Malvina must have talked to you about my affairs," she said stiffly.

"Please don't be angry, my dear," begged Miss Philura. "I oughtn't to have mentioned it; but seeing my cousin so unexpectedly — though perhaps I shouldn't call him *that*. His mother was related to my mother — first cousin, once removed, I think it was. But Cousin Caroline has always been kindness itself. And you don't mind my knowing just a little bit, do you, dear?"

The girl made no reply to this appeal; her slim shoulders lifted slightly as she searched in a small tin box on the window-sill for a hook of the right sort.

"In the Encircling Good there is a lavish abundance of happiness for you," said Miss Philura softly.

There was a pink spot on either thin cheek. Her blue eyes shone bright as stars.

"I had to tell you," she went on. "It wouldn't be generous to keep it to

myself. Everything will come right, if you will only —"

The girl faced about in her chair.

"I don't know what Cousin Malvina Bennett told you," she said coldly. "I was engaged to be married and — his mother — I — I wasn't good enough. She made it perfectly plain. I saw that it was true. I wasn't — *suitable.* So it's all over. He went to London, or Germany — I don't know where exactly. He never wrote to me after — after I explained — We said good-bye, and he went away."

The young voice trembled slightly.

"I've told you this because I — I can't bear to have people sorry for me. So — please — don't."

"I know — I know, my dear. I want to be glad for you."

Miss Philura stooped and dropped a butterfly kiss on top of the blond head.

"I shall be glad for you — I am glad

— this minute. Everything will come right. You'll see!"

"How could it?" murmured the girl. "You don't know *her*."

It lacked exactly ten minutes of six o'clock when Miss Philura's bell jangled, and Miss Philura herself, quite pink and happy after a reassuring glance at the biscuits browning propitiously in the oven, opened the door to admit Mr. Trimmer's smart clerk, looking smarter than ever in clothes which his hostess was totally unable to appreciate, but which roused her to vague wishes concerning Mr. Pettibone's ministerial wardrobe.

The tea-table was already spread in cozy proximity to the steady fires of the scarlet geraniums, which had flowered with surprising earliness this fall, and almost immediately the two sat down.

Upon second thoughts, which are often good and worthy, Miss Philura had added to her menu baked potatoes and a dish

of creamed cod-fish — a delectable *plat*, when properly prepared. The young man was hungry, there could be no doubt of that. Miss Philura beamed with delight when he accepted his fifth biscuit.

"Now, Gregory," she said, with something of the authority of the successful hostess, "I want you to tell me how it happens that you are in Innisfield, working for George Trimmer. I do hope —"

She coughed delicately behind her fringed napkin.

"I hope the family has not met with reverses."

This, she felt sure, was the proper term to apply to the losses of very rich people.

"No," he said, quite seriously; "father and mother are quite well, and they haven't lost any of their confounded money. I wish they had. Yes, by George, I do. I wish they'd lose every cent of it."

"Oh, my dear," deprecated Miss Philura, in pained surprise.

"I've — er — met with reverses, though," pursued the young man, "that's why I've cut it out."

Miss Philura looked inquiringly.

"You've cut — ?"

He nodded.

"The whole outfit. I'm my own man now; working for my living. Getting eight dollars a week, and living on five. What do you think of that?"

She didn't know exactly what to think, in view of his appetite. He had absent-mindedly reached for his sixth biscuit and was buttering it thickly.

"I haven't had a decent meal before, since I came to Innisfield; and you certainly can cook, Cousin Philura. That white stuff, now. I'd like to see mother's chef up against that. May I have some more; and another potato?"

Miss Philura beamed.

"It's only creamed cod-fish, Greg," she told him.

"It's bully stuff. I'm going to have it every day at my house — if I ever get one."

He heaved a deep sigh, which was not all content.

"And your dear mother — what does she think of — of your —"

"Mother supposes me to be spending money in London, Paris, Baden — she thinks I'm in Europe. She saw me on board the *Calonia* four weeks ago. I had a first-class cabin, several thousand dollars and, incidentally, the maternal blessing."

He was staring down at his plate.

"Won't you have some cake?" urged Miss Philura. "It isn't quite as nice as I could wish, but —"

He leaned his elbows on the table and stared across at her.

"Do you think one person — a fellow's

mother, say — has a *right* to arrange his life for him, according to her own ideas, like — er — bric-a-brac on a table?"

His boyish good looks had hardened into something strangely stern. For a fleeting instant Miss Philura thought he resembled the majestic person who had constituted herself the undisputed arbiter of so many destinies.

"If you do," he went on, "I don't. I suppose I'll forgive my mother sometime. I shall if —"

He paused to scowl darkly.

"The preserves," twittered Miss Philura gently, "aren't quite as clear as usual this year; but I hope — you'll —"

"I was engaged to the dearest, sweetest, most innocent little girl on God's earth," he went on. "She was — Lord! I can't talk about it. But she — You see I graduated in June, and I had my twenty-first birthday in April. I'm no baby, and we'd planned to be married and

go abroad together. Mother had always said I should go as soon as I'd got my degree. I got it, and it was *cum laude*, by George. I worked like a dog. But when I told her —"

"You mean Cousin Caroline?"

"Yes, when I told mother about it and expected — The Lord knows what I ought to have expected. She's as hard as — as this table."

And he smote the mahogany a blow that set Miss Philura's ancestral tea-cups dancing.

"I beg your pardon, cousin! Hope I haven't broken anything. But I can't think of it without getting swearing mad!"

"Oh, I hope not, my dear," murmured Miss Philura. "Your dear mother —"

"She used to wash my mouth out with kitchen soap for what she called profanity," he said moodily. "But kitchen soap isn't in it for what she's goaded me into,

since. Look here, cousin, I'll tell you what she did. She went to see my dearest girl — I had asked her to do it; but I might have known better. She went to see her, and — and — it's too brutal — she told my darling that she wasn't good enough. Think of that, will you? An innocent, white-souled angel of a girl, too pure and sweet for any man to look at with anything but worship. And my mother told her she must give me up. Because — Oh, rot! It makes me sick! Genevieve sewed for a living, and I —"

"Genevieve?" repeated Miss Philura.

"That's her name — pretty, isn't it? But it isn't a patch on her."

An excited colour was coming and going in Miss Philura's cheeks. What should she do? Her duty to Cousin Caroline loomed majestic and threatening like that lady herself in irate mood, as she gazed across the table at the face of her young kinsman.

"Oh, my dear Gregory," she murmured gently. "How very — extraordinary! But you — you aren't eating anything."

The young man paid no sort of heed to the agitation of his hostess.

"She's in this town somewhere," he went on. "I wormed that much out of her mother."

"But how could you — in London, you said; or was it East Boston? I am so surprised, you know, to think —"

"I didn't stay in London," he explained. "I allowed mother to ship me off, for I wanted time to mull things over. I came back directly, and went straight to see Genevieve. But she was gone. And she'd made her mother promise not to tell where she was. She's proud, the poor darling, and when my mother — Oh, confound it! I can't talk about it. But I want you to help me find her. I've ransacked the town, and I can't get any trace of her."

He fixed compelling eyes upon Miss Philura.

"That's why I went to work for Trimmer, I thought she'd be sure to come there to buy something; and besides, I wanted to show mother and father I could earn my own living and hers, too. You know everybody around here, Cousin Philura, and you must have seen her. She's tall and slender. Her eyes are brown and her hair — You ought to see her hair. Such a lot of it — and all shiny and curling. I've got a bit of it here."

He produced a wallet, from out a pocket of which he took a folded paper.

"There!" he said, lifting a long strand of yellow hair from its wrapping, "did you ever see anything like that? — fine and soft and lovely. It's like her."

"Yes, yes — indeed; I am so — so — interested, dear Gregory; and isn't that the door-bell? Pray excuse me while I answer it."

It was, as might have been expected, the Rev. Mr. Pettibone who craved admittance. Miss Philura heaved a deep breath of relief as she looked into his strong, tranquil face.

"I'm so very glad you've come," she whispered, as he stooped to kiss her. "Really, I couldn't think — what to do. My cousin is here — or perhaps I should say, my distant relative. Cousin Caroline always speaks of me in that way, and so of course —"

Somewhat breathlessly she ushered him into the little sitting-room, where her guest stood moodily staring at the coals in the base-burner.

"My distant relative, Gregory Van Duser, Mr. Pettibone," she managed to say. Then while the two shook hands, looking squarely into each other's eyes after the fashion of men, she withdrew to the kitchen to gain composure.

"Oh, Morty dear," she whispered, as

she recklessly bestowed upon the cat the remainder of the creamed cod-fish, which would have done perfectly well for her own breakfast, "to think I know where she is this minute, and it is in my power to make two young creatures perfectly happy and to foil Cousin Caroline as well. I'm afraid I can't help doing it. And I *am* so glad! But I shall ask him, he'll know whether I ought to or not."

But Providence — which is not always hostile (whatever some people may think) and which, indeed, appears to interest itself particularly and most benignly in the loves of young and innocent beings — asked no odds of the Rev. Mr. Pettibone, nor yet of Miss Philura.

Gregory Van Duser, very stiff though polite toward the elderly person who had interrupted his conversation with Miss Philura, presently took his leave, and went swinging off down the street at a great pace.

At the corner, just beneath the ice-bound branches of a great elm, a shadowy figure had paused and was in the act of introducing a letter into the narrow mouth of a post-box, when the arc-light struck a sparkle of gold from the bent head.

Young Gregory's heart leaped to his throat — to his lips.

"Genevieve!" he cried.

X

Miss Malvina Bennett stood rubbing her chilled fingers over Miss Philura's cook-stove, from which that little lady had just taken a pan of hot water for her breakfast things. Miss Bennett wore a shawl over her head, and she had not removed from the front of her dress the faded pin-cushion, fashioned in the shape of a heart and bristling with pins and needles.

"I s'pose you've heard about Genevieve," she began. "She said he was here takin' supper with you last night. — An' to think of his bein' a relative of yours!"

"Oh!" cried Miss Philura. In her agitation she almost dropped the cracked tea-cup, which she had used for fifteen years, drinking her tea and coffee lukewarm out of consideration for its delicate

condition. "But I — I didn't tell him. I couldn't think what my duty was to — to Cousin Caroline. But I asked Mr. Pettibone, and he said —"

"I was settin' b' the stove readin' that continued story in the Fashion Monthly," chimed in Miss Bennett, "An' Genevieve, she'd been writin' a letter to her ma. — A better girl than Genevieve Parsons never lived if I do say it, bein' sister-in-law to her ma's own sister.

"'Cousin Malvina,' she says, 'I'll just run out an' slip this letter in the box. I'll be back in a minute.'

"'Put on your coat,' I sez; 'it's growin' cold.' Then I forgot all about her, havin' got to that pint in the story where Lionel proposes to Lady Clara; an' she says she's always loved him, from a child. Well, as I say, I'd completely forgotten Genevieve's goin' out t' the post-box, when all of a sudden the clock struck nine.

"'Land!' I sez, 'whatever's got Genevieve?'

"Up I jumps an' puts on my shawl an' runs out t' the letter-box. The' wa' n't a soul in sight. My! but I was scart. Thinks s' I, she's been broodin' over her troubles so long she's out of her mind, mebbe. I started for your house, hard 's I could go, leavin' m' front door wide open, o' course the wind blew in an' broke the lamp-chimbly. I found the glass on the floor this mornin'. Lucky it didn't set the house afire.— Then I see Genevieve. She was comin' down the street with a man.

"Goodness! Wasn't I flabbergasted. They didn't see me; but just dawdled along 's if it was June. They went right by me; bein' s' took up with each other they didn't see me no more'n 's if I was a 'lectric-light pole. When they got t' the house they stopped inside th' gate, an' right in the shadder of the big lilac bush

he kissed her. I heerd it. Then I took a-holt.

"'Genevieve!' I sez; just like that I sez it.

"She give a little scream.

"'Oh, Cousin Malvina,' she sez, 'I thought you were —'

"'Yes,' I sez; 'you thought I was safe in the house, b' th' base-burner, readin' a love-story. But I ain't,' I sez. 'I'm right on the job o' lookin' after you,' I sez; 'same 's I told your ma I would.'

"Then *he* spoke up.

"'I'm Gregory Van Duser," he sez, 'an' Genevieve is going to marry me right away.'

"'Oh, Greg!' she sez.

"'Yes, Genevieve,' he sez. 'You've promised, you know.'"

Miss Bennett paused for breath.

"Dear, dear!" murmured Miss Philura.

"Ain't you glad?" demanded Malvina Bennett. "You'd better b'lieve I be. You

wouldn't know Genevieve this mornin'. When I come up t' the sewin'-room after doin' up the breakfas' dishes, there she set, 's pretty as a pink, singin' kind of soft t' herself. An' what d' you think she was doin'? "

Miss Bennett paused dramatically.

"I'm sure I don't know," murmured Miss Philura, wrinkling her forehead.

She couldn't help thinking of Cousin Caroline Van Duser; and feeling like a guilty conspirator, as she pictured to herself that majestic lady's wrath and consternation at the swift undoing of all her carefully laid plans.

"You couldn't guess in a hundred years — not ef you was t' die fer it."

"She wasn't — crying? " hazarded Miss Philura,—"with joy, I mean," she amended quickly.

"Cryin'? — cryin'," sniffed Miss Bennett. "You ain't got much 'magination, Philura. No; she wa' n't cryin'. She

was a-sewin' purple buttons all down the back of Mis' Buckthorn's red waist!"

"Really?" interrogated Miss Philura, weakly endeavouring to banish the stern visage of Mrs. J. Mortimer Van Duser from her mind.

"An' she'd sewed 'em on good an' firm, too," continued Miss Bennett, with a cackle of laughter. "I'm goin' t' send her over here t' finish your black an' purple this afternoon. I can't bother with her. An', say, Philura, that reminds me, I'll take them white goods right home with me now an' get the dress cut out an' ready t' fit. That's really what I come for."

"The white goods," repeated Miss Philura in a low voice. "You mean —"

"I mean your weddin'-dress. I'd ought t' have started on it b'fore; but I wanted t' git the shop kind o' cleaned up an' th' work out th' house, b'fore I begun on yours."

"But I — the material—"

Miss Philura's voice died into silence. She polished the knife she was holding with tremulous fingers.

"Ain't you got the goods yit?" almost screamed Miss Bennett, "an' th' weddin' only a week off, come Thursday. Why, Philura Rice!"

"It — it — I believe it is on the way," faltered Miss Philura.

Then she straightened her small figure confidently.

"It is on the way," she repeated firmly. "It will be here soon."

"I sh'd hope so, if I'm a-goin' t' make it," said Miss Bennett. "I don't want t' throw it together. An' I'd planned t' trim it with some o' that new kind o' trimmin' made out o' th' goods. It's pleated on both sides, the pleats turned opposite ways. It's awful stylish; but it takes time t' make it."

"It must be — pretty."

Miss Philura spoke with a sweet aloof-

ness which drew Miss Bennett's faded eyes to her face.

"Well, I must say," she syllabled, "you don't seem t' worry none 'bout your goods bein' d'layed. Some folks 'd be wild, an' flyin' 'round like a hen with her head cut off."

Miss Philura smiled a sweet faint smile, which somehow made Miss Bennett think of a pictured angel in her copy of Pilgrim's Progress.

"I am not at all worried," she said. "I am sure — sure it will come in time."

XI

Mrs. J. Mortimer Van Duser sat before the fire in her dressing-room, feeling quite at ease in a carefully relaxed position. Even her jewelled hands lay supinely amid the silken folds of her negligee. Mrs. Van Duser was resting after a strenuous afternoon at the Ontological Club, during the course of which she had presented a pregnant paper on "Parental Influence as related to the Law of Karma." An earnest discussion had followed the reading of the paper, with Mrs. Van Duser as its pivotal point, so to speak,— or, to quote Dr. Aurilla Robinson-Cobb's words, "its radio-active centre."

Mrs. Van Duser had found it all exceedingly uplifting, yet even her robust, well-nourished body demanded its dues of rest and relaxation, and Mrs. Van Duser was not one to push ontological theories

to the point of what she privately considered folly. There were many worthy persons interested in the mental cult, of which Mrs. Van Duser had become a shining exponent, who had no social responsibilities and who were not burdened with an excess of this world's goods. Such individuals could scarcely realise the weight of duties which devolved upon Mrs Van Duser, in her double rôle of radio-active centre of the Ontological Club and undisputed leader of that august inner circle of society which constituted the veritable Hub (written of course with a capital letter) of that mighty wheel of progress called Boston.

Mrs. Van Duser made it a point to relax — she justly objected to the metaphysically false term " devitalise " — particularly when dining out, the dinner to be followed by an equally important function in the shape of a great reception at the home of a woman who attempted (but

without success) to rival Mrs. Van Duser both socially and ontologically.

As everyone knows one must think of nothing at all when in a condition of relaxation. And if attainable there is nothing more potent than this quiescent state to remove wrinkles and other signs of advancing years — both a false concept of the carnal mind — or to restore vigour and brilliancy to the mental powers. Mrs. Van Duser wished particularly to look and feel at her best on this evening, for which Fifine, her maid, was already laying out the newest and most successful of her Popham Paris creations.

But her mind with annoying persistence kept harking back to the discussion of the afternoon. And with the variously conflicting views of the Law of Karma as related to the subject of Parental Responsibility came the thought of her own and only son, Gregory. His name was Milton Gregory Van Duser, after two of his

great-grandfathers — Mrs. Van Duser was not one to grow lax in the matter of great-grandfathers.

Milton Gregory had shown alarming tendencies of late. A distressing affair with Miss Popham's seamstress. But right at the crucial point in the young man's career parental influence had come into play.

Mrs. Van Duser breathed deep contentment as she rapidly reviewed her own part in the invincible workings of Karma. The girl had been amenable to the higher voice of reason; there had been no foolish tears, no recriminations, except, of course, on the part of that very common person, her mother.

On her own plane of life, Genevieve Parsons had acquitted herself with credit. She had actually approved the girl's self-control, and her spirit, too; it had been admirable. And she had saved her son from a frightful mésalliance by the

promptness and unswerving firmness with which she had performed her own duty in the matter.

Mrs. Van Duser had not once alluded to her own recent experience with Cosmic Law, at the Club that afternoon. Such a course would have been indelicate; but the consciousness of her success had lent a serene and compelling majesty to her mien and utterances as she dwelt upon the basic relations of motherhood to Karma.

Dear Gregory was enjoying himself with well-bred persons of his own class in a country house in Kent. Mrs. Van Duser's social circle was wide, its circumference even including a few titles on the other side of the water.

She thought now with a smile of maternal pride of her darling Gregory's ingenuous good looks, of his faultless wardrobe, of his prospective millions. All of which she knew would be duly appreciated

by the noble but impoverished dowager countess of Meadhurst. Why should she not — possibly within a few months — be introducing to select Boston circles, "my daughter, Lady Clara Van Duser."

She could almost see herself and the tall, plain (but very aristocratic) English girl, who had so far remained unplucked upon the ancestral tree. Dear Gregory must seize the brilliant opportunity which lay within his easy reach.

She found herself quite rigid and tense in her chair with the mental effort of transmitting her ideas telepathically to dear Gregory. Then Fifine appeared at her elbow bearing a tray with the cup of bouillon which her mistress always partook of just before dressing.

Mrs. Van Duser roused herself to take the cup from the maid's hand.

"Has Mr. Van Duser come in yet, Fifine?" she asked. "And are there any letters?"

"Oui, madame. Mr. Van Duser is in his dressing-room, madame," replied the girl. "I s'all ask Parkyns for ze lettaires."

Mrs. Van Duser seldom asked for her mail before dressing for dinner. It was her habit to examine it by the cold light of morning, in an apartment devoted to correspondence and the higher pursuit of literature as embodied in various club papers on a wide variety of themes. But to-night she wanted to hear from her son. "Darling Greg!" she apostrophised him mentally. Had he made the acquaintance of Lady Clara Hurcomb? Was Karma going to be kind? She willed that it should be.

But there was no letter from dear Gregory. Perhaps it was too soon to expect one, after his cablegram announcing a safe arrival in Liverpool.

She glanced carelessly through the heap of envelopes, bills, invitations, letters

from needy persons — and here was one from Innisfield.

The rather unformed and timid hand announced it unopened as coming from Philura Rice. Mrs. Van Duser laid it upon the pile of unopened envelopes, relegated to her later consideration. Surely Philura Rice could have no adequate reason for further addressing so distant a relative as Mrs. Van Duser. "A letter," as that majestic person occasionally informed certain presuming (and of course needy) persons of her acquaintance — " a letter, which is neither necessary nor agreeable, is, in effect, an unwarrantable intrusion; not less so, indeed, than the rude pushing in of an uninvited guest."

Mrs. Van Duser had not invited correspondence on the part of Philura Rice, beyond those suitable acknowledgments of her bounty which reached her from time to time, as occasion required. She

continued to eye Miss Philura's modest letter with a stern and rebuking gaze.

Philura deserved and should listen to the aphorism concerning uninvited correspondence at the earliest opportunity. For the present her letter should remain (as it deserved) unread and unnoticed. And yet —

Do insensate letters emanate their information, like Roentgen rays, piercing the futile defences of enfolding paper and sealed envelopes? What was there about that small oblong envelope of yellowish white paper, addressed in faded ink, in a timid, unformed hand, which again and yet again drew the reluctant gaze of the great lady, and which finally impelled those jewelled fingers to open it?

In point of fact Mrs. J. Mortimer Van Duser, having finished her bouillon, handed the cup to her maid, reached for Miss Philura's letter.

"Dear Cousin Caroline: (she read)

You may imagine my surprise and pleasure at seeing dear Cousin Gregory —"

"What!" murmured Mrs. Van Duser, arching her brows and majestically replacing her eye glasses. "The woman must have lost her mind!"

"He is looking very well, and I had the great honour and pleasure of entertaining him at tea on Wednesday."

"Absurd!" commented dear Gregory's mother. Had she not received a cablegram scarcely two weeks ago announcing his safe arrival in Liverpool? How then could he be taking tea with Philura Rice in Innisfield?

"Of course Cousin Gregory has written you of his intended marriage, which he tells me —"

Some sort of inarticulate sound burst from Mrs. Van Duser's lips at this point. She read the remaining words of the letter with a single comprehensive glance.

Then she rose to her feet, her wonted

majesty of deportment giving place to haste and agitation.

"Fifine!" she called sharply. "My travelling dress, and motoring wraps, and tell Parkyns to order the touring car at once!"

"Oui, madame; already the limousine waits."

"I said the touring car. It makes better time. Quickly, girl, my high laced shoes! — That artful, designing creature — After all my pains, she must have —"

Mrs. Van Duser was herself pulling open bureau drawers, and placing various toilet articles in a small travelling bag, as the latter unintelligible words fell from her lips.

Five minutes later she was being hooked into a broadcloth gown of severe and uncompromising lines, when the door opened and Mr. J. Mortimer Van Duser stood upon the threshold. He was in full even-

ing dress, and he held an open letter in his hands. For an instant he gazed in astonished silence at his august consort, who appeared to have suddenly lost the dignity and poise for which she was so justly celebrated.

"My dear Caroline," he said, dubiously, "may I inquire —"

Mrs. Van Duser faced him, twitching herself out of the hands of the curious maid.

"You may go, Fifine. Pack some sandwiches and a thermos bottle of hot coffee. I shall not wait to dine."

"But my dear," expostulated Mr. Van Duser, coming into the room and closing the door behind him. "What does this mean? Surely, you —"

"John!" cried Mrs. Van Duser, with an alarming wildness in her eyes, from which the gold-rimmed glasses had fallen, like scales, as it were. "John, I have just had a letter from Philura Rice, and

she says Gregory is in Innisfield, and that he is going to be married to that — seamstress. But I shall save him yet."

"Er — would you mind sitting down — ah — quietly? And —"

"Sitting down — quietly, did you say? John, I wonder at you! I shall go to Innisfield and bring my poor boy home with me. Nothing shall prevent me."

"But, my dear, I must insist."

When John Van Duser spoke in that tone, which it must be owned had been seldom of late, to his wife, at least, he was sure to be obeyed.

Mrs. Van Duser paused in the act of tying a motoring bonnet under her massive chin and gazed at her husband. Her eye caught sight of the familiar handwriting on the sheet which he was deliberately unfolding.

"Has he — has Gregory written?" she asked.

"If you will take that thing off your

head and sit down quietly I will read what he says," was Mr. Van Duser's reply.

Mrs. Van Duser sat down upon the extreme verge of a chair in a rigid and uncompromising attitude. She did not remove the motor-bonnet.

"You are not," said Mr. Van Duser, "going to Innisfield to-night."

There was nothing controversial in his tone, but an immense though calm conviction.

"Is it too late, John?"

"Too late? Yes, my dear; to my way of thinking it's gone beyond you."

"Are they married already? Philura said — She actually had the impertinence to ask us to stop with her, if we came — as she hoped we would — to Greg's wedding to that artful, designing —"

"Be careful, my dear; you're talking about your future daughter-in-law," Mr. Van Duser warned her.

He was actually smiling.

"John, how can you?" demanded his wife. "If it is not too late I can and will prevent —"

"Sit down, Carrie; sit down. Now, let me read what the boy has to say for himself."

And without further preamble he began to read, but unluckily in a tone so low that Fifine, flattening her small pink ear against the keyhole could scarcely hear a word.

"Mon dieu!" she cried, when describing the scene below stairs to a circle of admiring auditors. "Nevaire have I seen ze madame like zat. She sit down when he say, 'Sit down'; she keep quiet when he tell her 'Keep quiet.' She listen to heem wizout words. Mon dieu! It is one miracle."

In his carefully modulated voice John Van Duser was reading his son's letter to the mother of his son. Gregory had written on this wise, in a dashing hand and

with great extravagance in the use of ink which here and there exploded in spatters and blots.

"Dear Dad, (read John Van Duser) I am writing to you instead of to mother because I believe you'll understand me better than she will. At any rate, I can and will speak to you as man to man.

"When mother shipped me off to Europe I suppose she thought of me as a small boy, caught stealing jam in her preserve closet. All she had to do was to put me to bed without supper and lock the closet door.

"I let her think so, for I wanted time to cool off and to let my darling girl get over the hurts mother had inflicted upon her. — She, at least, had no idea that she was stealing anybody's preserves.— So I went to Liverpool. Of course I came back directly, and I've found her and myself, too, I think.

"We're to be married to-morrow at

Cousin Philura's. — She's a brick; Genevieve and I both love her. So is her minister. He demurred a bit about marrying us but when I'd convinced him that we were both of age and knew our own minds he consented.

"Now, don't imagine that we're going to come home to be taken care of. We're going to live right here in Innisfield. It's a bully little place and we both like it. I'm going on working in the Trimmer Emporium. I get eight dollars a week, and I'll jolly old Trimmer up into making it ten; and besides there's the five hundred a year from grandmother's bequest. We'll have no trouble getting on.

"I hope you and mother will come to see us married. I'd feel better about it, and so would my darling girl. But whether you will or not, to-morrow will find your affectionate son Gregory Van Duser the happiest man alive!"

There was a silence which could be felt

in the room as John Van Duser read the last words of his son's letter. He folded the sheet and returned it to its envelope.

"I telegraphed our congratulations," he said slowly, his eyes on his wife's rigid face.

XII

Mrs. Van Duser seemed to come to life at this.

"*Our* congratulations?" she repeated. "Our congratulations, indeed! No; John. I must decline to enter into any such collusion, even with you. I can never —"

Mr. Van Duser drew a chair to his wife's side, and deliberately passed his arm about her substantial waist. He was calm and smiling.

"Now, Carrie," he began, "I don't want you to make a fool of yourself, and I'm not going to allow it."

His tone was pleasant and his grey eyes were actually twinkling. But Caroline P. Van Duser was interiorly convinced of the truth of his words.

She answered him in the deepest, most rotund tones of her platform voice.

"My dear John," she said majestically, "I think you forget yourself."

These words addressed to any other individual would not have failed of their result. A blighted human being would have slunk — one uses the word advisedly — slunk quietly and unobtrusively away from the Jovian glance of Caroline P. Van Duser's eyes, and blessed the opportunity of so slinking.

But John Van Duser took not the slightest notice of his wife's remark. Instead he tightened the clasp of his arm about her waist and said quite simply and unaffectedly,

"I never told you before, Carrie, but I'm going to now. My mother didn't want me to marry you. She set up quite a row about it in fact."

He appeared to relapse into revery.

"W — what?" stammered the lady in the motoring bonnet. "Your mother — objected —"

Either the idea or the heat of the room appeared oppressive, for she untied the mammoth structure of fur and velvet and cast it from her.

"That's right, Carrie," Mr. Van Duser said kindly. "Better take your coat off, too."

"I don't believe it," cried Mrs. Van Duser. "Wasn't I a Peabody?"

"You were certainly born of that illustrious name," Mr. Van Duser conceded. "But you had no money, while Abby Decker had four thousand dollars in her own right, enough to buy a house with, as my dear mother faithfully pointed out to me, in season and out of season."

"Abby Decker," repeated Mrs. Van Duser. "Abby — Decker! Why, John, she —"

"I didn't love Abby Decker," he told her, "and I did love Carrie Peabody. I had it out with my mother along that line, and I won. I told her I was poor, but I

didn't intend to stay so; that I didn't need Abby Decker's four thousand dollars and never should. But I did need and would have Carrie Peabody."

"But, John, your mother never so much as hinted anything of the sort to me. I always thought —"

"You always thought yourself a most welcome addition to the family. Exactly so, my dear Carrie," put in John Van Duser. "My mother was a sensible woman, in the main, and she knew me well enough to understand her duty toward you. I guess she wasn't sorry in the long run."

Recalling the pampered old lady, swathed in costly furs and sparkling with the diamonds she loved, Mrs. Van Duser silently agreed with him.

"But, John," she said, this time without a trace of her platform manner, "this — this seamstress is a very ordinary sort of person. And her mother —"

She finished with an undisguised shudder.

"I went to see Mrs. Parsons to-day," her husband said slowly. "Greg's letter came by the morning post, and I've been rather — er — busy since. To tell you the truth, Carrie, there isn't a shadow of anything derogatory against the girl. They're quite poor people; so were we. Don't forget it. The girl has a fair education. She is beautiful, industrious, and the mother told me there was a Peabody cousin somewhere back, on the father's side, and his great-grandfather's brother-in-law was a Winthrop. So there you have it. Greg loves her, and he's going to marry her to-morrow, whether we're there with a blessing or not. If we're not —"

John Van Duser paused to eye his wife fixedly. To his astonishment he saw — not the Mrs. J. Mortimer Van Duser, the august partner of his later years, the radio-active centre of various clubs and

boards of management, and foremost in the steadily increasing ranks of fashionable suffragists,— no; all these majestic and truly awe-inspiring attributes appeared to have dropped away like the motor cloak, which lay upon the floor. What he saw was a rather stout woman, past middle age, but looking every inch the mother of his son.

Her eyes sought his own appealingly, almost humbly.

"If we — if we don't go, you think Greg —?"

"We should lose him," he said. "And, really, my dear, a beautiful daughter, distantly related to yourself and the Winthrops, what couldn't you make of her?"

Mrs. Van Duser heaved a deep sigh. Her eyes became reminiscent.

"Her manner," she mused, "was really distinguished. I thought so at the time. And her figure — properly gowned — yes, well —"

John Van Duser drew her into both arms and kissed her on the hesitating lips.

"That's my sensible Carrie. I knew you'd see it. We'll go down to-morrow, and dine with Philura after the young folks have gone on their honeymoon."

Mrs. Van Duser lay supinely against his shoulder.

"I don't seem able to resist anything, even to dining with Philura Rice," she said weakly. "But, John, surely we can't allow Greg to live in Innisfield and go on working for that — Bimmer person. Small shop-keeping is so vulgar, and the poor things couldn't exist on the absurd figures Gregory mentioned."

"Oh, yes they could," asserted John Van Duser cheerfully. "We lived on less, and you did the cooking and washed the dishes. My word, I'd like one of your pies occasionally now, if I could get it. But, I'll tell you, Carrie, I've looked into that Trimmer business. I found the pro-

prietor a decent fellow, very much in need of capital. He's got a fair start over all competitors, and in the end I decided — not to make 'Milt' one of them."

He paused to chuckle to himself.

"Milt?" inquired his wife, sitting up, and beginning to replace her loosened hairpins.

"That's what Trimmer calls Gregory," he told her. "'Here you, Milt, run down and put coal on the furnace,'" he quoted. "It won't hurt him, not a bit of it. And he knows it, the young rascal!"

"I could bring her out this winter," said Mrs. Van Duser, "and if Gregory wants to work why not take him in with you?"

John Van Duser smote his knee with his flattened palm.

"Let him go his own gait, I say, Carrie. It'll make a man of him as nothing else will. And they need to be alone together, in their own nest, just as we were,

my dear, in what I sometimes look back to as the happiest days of my life."

Mrs. Van Duser arose to the full height of her majestic figure.

"John," she said solemnly, "I shall teach Gregory's wife how to make pie-crust properly."

XIII

Happily unaware of the crucial hour upon which depended much of their future peace and happiness, young Gregory Van Duser and Genevieve Parsons sat in Malvina Bennett's dingy little sitting-room, with its base-burner, its centre table covered with a chenille table spread, its crayon presentments of departed Bennetts, and its kerosene lamp, illumining the blond head of Genevieve drooped over the white stuff in her lap.

There had been no question whatever as to what Genevieve should be married in.

"You're a-goin' t' stan' up in a white dress, Genevieve," Malvina Bennett had said. "I c'n throw it together in two jerks of a lamb's tail, an' any way Philura Rice's goods ain't come yet — I'll bet she'll have to be married in her black an' purple."

Miss Bennett had marched straight to the Trimmer Emporium, where she had cheerfully expended the whole of a ten dollar bill on breadths of shimmering white silk and several yards of the useful lace known as "German Val."

It was upon this creation that Genevieve was putting certain deft Parisian touches learned of Miss Popham.

"I wish," said Gregory fervently, "that you'd put away that sewing and look at me."

Genevieve looked at him over the airy stuff in her lap; demure dimples played about her lips.

She looked as distractingly lovely as a beautiful girl may, when sewing her wedding gown in the presence of the man she will marry on the morrow. Gregory promptly lost his head, with results which may be imagined.

"Couldn't Malvina finish it?" he begged.

"She couldn't finish what I'm doing," the girl told him, and exhibited with pride the embroidery she was setting here and there upon the garment.

He felt in his pocket and presently produced a piece of yellow paper.

"I want you to see father's telegram. You see everything's all right, dear."

She read the scrawl, a sweet gravity on her young face.

"I was afraid your — your mother would never forgive us," she said, "but it says, 'Hearty congratulations from mother and self. Will be with you tomorrow.'"

"He sent it right off the bat," exulted Gregory, "soon as he got my letter. I tell you, my dad is a brick; so is mother, when you come to know her. But I'll confess I was a bit surprised to have her come around without a protest."

Her swift glance warned him to forbear. He had been about to confide to

her the maternal ambitions concerning Lady Clara. Instead he said,

"Shall we keep house or board when we come back?"

"Keep house, of course," she told him. "I can do everything."

He gazed at her with adoring awe.

"We shall only have what I earn and grandmother's money. It won't be much. Do you suppose we can do it? What do you say, Genevieve?"

She cast him a delicious glance of patronage over the white stuff in her lap.

"I'm used to being poor, even if you aren't. We shall have everything we need. Have you a piece of paper?"

He felt about in his pocket and produced a half sheet of letter paper, folded once across.

"Put down first, rent twenty dollars," she commanded.

He gazed at her incredulously.

"Malvina only pays seventeen for

this," she said crisply, "and we can't afford more."

"All right," he agreed. "I'd rather live here with you than anywhere else without you. Now what?"

"I know you'll be hungry and want a lot to eat. But we'll have a garden and some fruit trees," she went on, a little pucker between her brown eyes, "so we'll say food forty."

"You mean forty a week — eh? Yes. I guess that's about the figure."

"I mean a month," she corrected him with the gentle superiority born of experience. "Then we'll have forty left for clothes, fuel, amusements, church, travelling and — and everything else, little things one doesn't think of, you know."

"Contingencies," murmured Gregory, setting down the forty dollars in his meagre row of figures and eyeing it contemplatively.

Then he passed the sheet over to the

girl, who surveyed it, her pretty head on one side.

"We shan't have a bit of trouble on that," she asserted hopefully.

She turned the bit of paper over and glanced at the other side.

"Why — what —?"

He was looking over her shoulder and incidentally dropping an occasional kiss on her bright hair.

"Oh, that," he said, "is a Scriptural curiosity. I picked it up in the store the other day."

"'The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want ten yards of white silk, with linings,'" read the girl. "Why, Greg, it's a shopping list."

"Read the rest," he urged; "perhaps you'll tell me what it means."

"Two white petticoats — I'd like one to be trimmed with an embroidered ruffle (she obeyed him). Four pairs of good stockings — one pair white, please. Three

n. g.s — One very pretty, trimmed with lace. A warm cloak — I'd love to have a fur collar on it. And thank you for everything. All things are mine!"

"Isn't that a unique document?" Gregory demanded. "And what, if one may inquire, is an 'n. g.'? I've always translated that particular combination of letters into 'no good.' But it doesn't appear to work out, when trimmed with lace."

But Genevieve was not even smiling. Instead something very like a mist dimmed her bright eyes as she looked up at him.

"Greg," she said, her voice vibrating between tears and laughter, "don't you understand? This is a shopping list; but it's not meant for your eyes nor mine. That dear little Miss Philura wrote it. It's her handwriting and her letter paper; I've seen both."

"Well," he commented stupidly. "Why should my dear old cousin mix her metaphors in such a remarkable way?

Isn't that first line out of the Bible?"

"Of course it is, Greg. She hasn't any money, poor dear, to buy these things; so she —"

He grasped the idea without further elucidation.

"By Jove!" he cried, staring at the paper; "it's a draft on the Encircling Good. Is that what you mean?"

"She talked to me about it," murmured the girl. "She said you — were in it — the Encircling Good, I mean; and that everything would come right, if I only believed. And oh, Greg, I didn't believe anything could change your mother after — after what she said to me. But something did,— you see, and we are so happy!"

"I'm blessed if I won't play the part," declared young Gregory, some moments later, during which no embroidery stitches were added to the wonder in her lap.

"You mean —?"

"I'll honour the draft. You buy the things, dear,— you know what she'll like, and we'll give them to her."

The girl shook her head.

"I shouldn't like her to know we'd seen this," she said slowly. "Besides we don't know exactly what she'd like. The cloak with the fur collar — It would have to be fitted."

"Suppose I shove some money under the door. That's a bully way to do, when you can't come right out with it. Just seal it in an envelope and —"

The bride-to-be suddenly caught his eager face between her two hands.

"I have it, Greg!" she cried. "We'll rent Miss Philura's cottage. She'll be going to the parsonage to live, and won't want it any more."

"It's a great little place," he approved, "apple trees in the back yard and a hen house. Oh, I'll dig the garden all right,

and you shall egg on the hens to furnishing us with lots of custards and omelets. We'll do it, and I'll pay six months in advance, and that'll take care of that blessed little woman's wants."

XIV

Miss Philura never forgot that particular Saturday — the one just before her marriage to the Rev. Silas Pettibone. For on that day several of "God's purposes," which had long persisted in the bud, suddenly unfolded before the little lady's astonished eyes.

The day began early — long before the light, in fact; for the house must be swept and dusted and scrubbed and polished, as never before, in honour of the wedding which was to take place under its roof that day.

To think of dear Gregory, she mused, and that lovely Genevieve — how happy they will be! And Cousin Caroline and Mr. Van Duser (she had never ventured to cousin that awful personage)— they had not appeared to be at all angry — were coming to the wedding; they would dine with her. Never in her wildest

dreams could she have thought of anything so surprising.

At six-thirty as she carefully wiped down the attic stairs (one could never tell where guests might wish to go) her mind reverted for a fleeting instant to the white wedding garment of her imaginings. It had not emerged from the Encircling Good, and Miss Philura's eyes wore a wondering, troubled expression. Could it be possible that she had allowed "fleshly and carnal desires" to carry her away? The Apostle Paul certainly mentioned such sins—"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life." She had deliberately avoided certain passages of the Pauline Epistles in her Scripture reading of late. How (she secretly wondered) could the Apostle Paul understand a woman's heart and a woman's desires? He had refused marriage (though undeniably he had boasted that he might marry if he wanted to). And he had sup-

posed the world was coming to an end in his day. It had not come to an end in the Pauline epoch, for here was Miss Philura painstakingly removing imaginary dust from the attic stairs and thinking about the white dress which remained inexorably hid from her eyes.

"Maybe it was Genevieve's dress I was thinking about all the time," she told herself with a faint renunciatory sigh. "I'd rather she'd have it, if there's only one dress there. I shan't mind wearing the black and purple brocade; perhaps it'll be more suitable."

She presently forgot all about the Apostle Paul as remotely related to wedding dresses, in the fervour of her labours. At eight o'clock she had worked her way through the upstairs bedrooms, and was just beginning the searching quest for dust along the edges of the front stair carpet when she heard a loud imperative knock at the back door.

It would be the milkman, she concluded, with the half pint of milk, which to-day must be increased to a quart, in view of the guests she had intrepidly undertaken to entertain.

She hastily opened the door, to confront the butter-woman.

"This ain't my regular day, I know," apologised Huldah, as she deliberately stepped in and deposited a basket on the table. "Thinks s' I, mebbe she c'd use an extry fowl, seein' 'twas her las' Sunday t' home. So I jes' jumped in m' wagon an' come down the hill."

Miss Philura's face was glorified with surprised colour.

"Did you know — had you heard I was going to have a wedding here to-day?" she asked.

"A weddin'?"

The butter-woman's broad smile suddenly faded.

"I thought — Didn't you tell me you

was goin' t' be married Thanksgivin' Day? You — you said so!"

"Oh, I am to be married Thanksgiving Day. This is my cousin's wedding — and so unexpected; and his father and mother coming from Boston. And I invited them to dinner. And Malvina told me last night Genevieve's mother is coming, too."

"Got anybody t' help you?" inquired Huldah briskly. "I sh'd think you'd need somebody t' take a-holt."

"Malvina's going to do what she can, but of course she's busy with Genevieve, and —"

The butter-woman removed her blanket shawl.

"Here I be, stout an' willin'. Jest tell me what, an' I'll whirl in an' do it. You look all beat out a'ready, an' I don't believe you've put on an ounce o' fat sence I was here last. Land! You remind me of a hen I had once; I couldn't no more

fatten her 'n I c'd flesh up the wind. Always on the go. But I fixed her. Shet her up in a coop where the' wa'n't nothin' else t' take up her mind. You'd ought t' seen her eat."

The butter-woman unrolled a gingham apron and tied it about her substantial waist.

"I kind o' thought I c'd find somethin' t' do t'day," she observed complacently. "I git lonesome up t' my house 'long 'bout this time o' th' year, an' I'd admire t' help you out, if you say so. How'd you like a chicken pie fer dinner? You bet I c'n make a good one!"

Miss Philura breathed a deep sigh of relief. The central dish of that particular dinner had lain heavily upon her soul, since she had so rashly proffered her hospitality.

"Chicken-pie with plenty o' good, rich cream gravy, mashed p'tatoes, biled onions — I fetched a few, thinkin' mebbe

you c'd use 'em. An' what fer dessert — heh? "

"I prepared sponge cake and lemon jelly, yesterday," twittered Miss Philura, "I thought —"

"An' I'll whip up a pint o' cream — that'll go all right. Now I guess I 'll put th' chicken over t' simmer gentle like, while I scrub up."

"But your — horse? "

"He's blanketed, an' sound asleep on two legs a'ready. I got t' run out, though, an' fetch in somethin' out th' wagon."

The something was a flat, oblong parcel wrapped in newspaper, which Huldah brought in under her apron and deposited on a chair in the corner of the kitchen.

"I don't want you should look at it till after I'm gone," she said, turning her broad back on Miss Philura, and speaking through the sacrificial smoke of the singeing chicken. "Ef I ain't done right,

you c'n let me know most any time, an' the' ain't no harm done."

Any fleeting curiosity which Miss Philura might properly have experienced was speedily swept away by the onrushing flood of events. At ten o'clock came in young Gregory Van Duser to unfold to Miss Philura his plan for renting her cottage.

"Don't tell me you have disposed of it already," he begged. "Genevieve has set her heart on living here."

Miss Philura gazed at him incredulously.

"Living here?" she echoed. "You can't mean that you — would think of —"

"Why not?" he urged. "I've always liked it since — er — since I had that bully little supper with you. Why didn't you tell me straight off that you knew my darling girl?"

There was a shadow of reproach in his honest eyes.

"I — was so taken by — by surprise," murmured Miss Philura, with a propitiatory smile. "And your dear mother — I couldn't think what my duty was, just at first, you know. Then Mr. Pettibone came in and you — I thought I should like to ask his advice in so serious a matter."

Young Gregory smiled upon her almost pityingly.

"So you fancied you would take sides with mother — eh?"

"Oh, no, my dear; surely not! I only —"

"And what did the minister say?"

"He said at once I had no right to keep Genevieve from you. He thought I should have told you —"

"Bully for Silas!" cried Gregory irreverently. "I'll go to church from now on with the regularity of a haloed saint. You'll see!"

Miss Philura wiped her eyes. "I am

so — so glad," she said quite unaffectedly.

"But the house — may we have it? — just as it is, please."

Miss Philura hesitated.

"I hadn't thought about renting it?" she said. "Of course I have lived here all my life, and it is a very well built house. But —"

"It wants a few repairs, I dare say."

"You would have to be careful about emptying the pans on the attic floor every time it rained —— there are four of them — and the oil-cloth around the chimney has to be wiped up every day when there is snow on the roof. Besides —"

"Well?" he suggested hopefully. "I guess we could cope with the roof in one way or another. What else?"

Miss Philura shook her head.

"I'm so used to living here," she said gently; "but I'm afraid you wouldn't know how to shut the side door at night;

you have to lift it just a little on the hinges before you lock it. Then there's the pantry window; it has to be stuffed with paper in very cold weather, because it's a little loose on one side."

"All right, I guess we could get along with the pantry window," he said confidently. "Is it a go, cousin?"

Miss Philura's blue eyes wore an introspective look.

"I don't believe you could manage the broken water pipe at the back door the way I do," she said. "I have to be very careful with pails, keeping them emptied, you know. I remember one time I was in Boston over three nights and Malvina Bennett, who had promised to attend to it, in case of rain, quite forgot. And when I arrived, there was a foot of water in the cellar."

"One could have a new pipe," offered Gregory. "You wouldn't mind, I suppose?"

"I hadn't thought of that. But repairs have been quite out of the question, you know. And one can manage quite nicely, if accustomed to a house."

"Will you trust us to live in it, if we'll promise to take the best kind of care of everything? — Give you a lease, with everything down in black and white. Rent payable in advance, twice a year."

"Oh, my dear, I couldn't think of asking rent of one of my own relatives, and Cousin Caroline always the soul of kindness! If you and Genevieve could be happy here — and it's really a very good house; very well built, and so comfortable — I shall be only too glad to have you here."

Gregory Van Duser shook his head decidedly.

"Couldn't think of it on those terms, Cousin Philura. Now, look here, we've got to rent some house and we can't afford to pay much, so why not this one.

You've got a jolly little garden and a hen-house."

"I have no chickens," she interrupted plaintively. "And the windows are quite destroyed, I fear."

"I was so sure you'd say 'yes' that I brought the lease. We want to come back to a home — Genevieve and I. Won't you look at it, please; and sign right here."

Miss Philura gazed distractedly at the legal-looking document he spread before her. Then all in a flutter she reached for her pen.

"But," he expostulated, "you haven't even looked at it. Never sign your name to anything you don't read carefully first."

It was a tremulous little signature she affixed after five minutes given to diligent study of the document.

"Are you satisfied that we aren't doing you?" he asked judicially. "We

want everything ship-shape and — er — legal, you know."

With that he took a roll of bills from his pocket and laid it on the table.

"Just six months' rent. Please receipt for it, cousin," and he shoved a form across the table, with a strictly business air.

"There! Now we've got a roof over our heads. Hurray!"

And he seized the dazed little lady and whirled her about in a mad dance of triumph.

"We'll take care of everything, repair when necessary and pay up regular. If we don't, you can evict us — see terms of the lease!" was his parting word as he hurried away.

"Why — why!" murmured Miss Philura, with dazzled eyes, as she counted the bills. Then she hugged them to her breast in a rapture of gratitude.

"And to think it had never occurred to

me I could rent my house for so much money!"

The Encircling Good, she concluded, was filled with kind thoughts travelling from heart to heart and flowering in beautiful and unexpected ways.

The rest of that surprising day was like its beginning. At eleven came a great hamper from a local florist.

"Just a few dozen roses, ma'am," explained the man who brought it, "and a bit of green for mantels and such. An' I'm to fix 'em if you please."

At a quarter to twelve arrived Mr. and Mrs. J. Mortimer Van Duser, from Boston in their limousine, which appeared taxed to its utmost capacity by the boxes and bundles which the footman brought into the house.

"A few wedding gifts for dear Gregory and — Genevieve," explained Mrs. Van Duser graciously, though it was evident that the name of her daughter-in-law-to-

be came hard. "And Mr. Van Duser thought, as your own wedding was so near, we might bring our gifts to you."

There was no time for the busy little hostess to take a single peep into the boxes marked with her own name, for the minister was already coming up the walk. And not ten minutes behind him came Gregory Van Duser with the sweetest girl in the world, wrapped in a great furred coat against the cold.

Miss Philura caught herself holding her breath with painful intensity as she opened the hospitable old door — hers no longer — to the young couple. And it must be owned that even the puissant Mrs. Van Duser momentarily shrank from the imminent meeting with the girl whom she had last seen standing proud and pale in the shabby front room of the shabby house in East Boston. The girl had won, and Mrs. Van Duser couldn't help stiffening a little after her old awe-inspiring

fashion, when she greeted Genevieve amid the pink roses and trailing greenery which had transformed Miss Philura's little parlour into a veritable bridal bower.

But Mr. J. Mortimer Van Duser!— Miss Philura glowed with shame at sight of the grey cat placidly stroking his whiskers by the fire. How could she have called him "Mortimer" in a spirit of sinful reprisal? This was a new species of Van Duser, new at least to Miss Philura; this was the John Van Duser who had triumphantly wooed and won Carrie Peabody long ago, and afterward everything else in sight worth having. Few people knew him now; even his wife had half forgotten that such a genial, tactful, altogether agreeable person existed.

It was all over quickly; even the dinner, at which Miss Philura found herself entertaining the whole company.

"Don't you worry a mite," was the butter-woman's exhortation. "I've got a

plenty for all comers, an' that there young feller that come with the ice-cream an' things is goin' to wait on table. He says he's us't t' doin' it, an' he cert'nly doos take a-holt good."

It was all a part of the dream — and by this time Miss Philura had given herself without reserve to the sweeping current of pleasant surprises which appeared to flow out of the invisible, filling all the meagre channels of her life to overflowing.

At four o'clock the butter-woman was pinning her heavy shawl about her.

"Well, I guess I'll be goin' along," she said. "You mus' be about beat out with all the doin's. But wa'n't that girl a picter a-standin' up t' be married; I peeked in th' door an' seen it all. An' the ol' folks, they was lookin' at both of 'em,— I had t' laf at that big, up-standin' lady; she didn't want t' cry; but she couldn't no more help it than nothin'. Well, I washed up everythin', but mebbe I ain't

put things in their right places. You c'n do that when you git rested. Now I'm a-goin' along."

But Miss Philura had seized both the brown hands in her own.

"Dear Huldah," she said, "I couldn't have done it alone. I didn't know they were all going to stay. I hadn't dishes enough, nor spoons and forks. Where did you get those pretty sprigged plates?"

"Oh, them? The young feller from Boston fetched 'em. He was a reel clever chap, an' he said my chicken-pie 'n' mashed p'tatoes went ahead of anything he ever tasted. His name was Tom."

The butter-woman opened the door suddenly.

"I'm glad I come," she said, in a curiously smothered voice. "I wouldn't a missed it. Ef you don't want what's in that box I'll take it away nex' time I come. Good-bye!"

Miss Philura heaved a long sigh of

mingled relief and weariness when she found herself once more alone in the little house. There was a scent of roses in the air, and the glamour of romance and happiness still lingered about the quiet rooms, once so sombre and desolate. Then remembering the butter-woman's words she lifted the oblong parcel which had lain all day on a chair in the kitchen and carried it to the window where the red light of the westering sun streamed in.

A stout string secured the newspaper wrappings, and to this was pinned a scrap of paper, on which Huldah had written in her cramped handwriting:

"Miss Philura, mam. Once I was going to be married. It was to be on Thanksgiving Day. But he got drowned at sea and never come back. So I kept the dress all these years. Tom bought it for me in London. If you'll wear it I'll be happy."

Miss Philura lifted the lid of shining

dark wood, all set with buds and leaves of mother of pearl, and the imperishable odour of roses long dead floated out to mingle with the fragrance of the bridal blooms. Beneath the wrappings of silken tissue lay something softly white, like the petals of chrysanthemums lapping over a heart of gold.

Miss Philura touched it with tremulous fingers; then she took it from the box and the rich, creamy satin flowed all about her to the floor.

And so Malvina Bennett came upon her, unaware, when she quietly opened the door.

"I jest run over t' —" began Miss Bennett. Then she stopped short with uplifted hands.

"My, my! Your goods is come at last, ain't it, an' jest in the nick o' time!"

Miss Philura gazed at her old friend through a glorified mist of tears. She was thinking, though she did not tell Malvina

so, that her bridal dress was truly a holy garment, since it had been the gift of a pure affection, cherished long, with love and tears, and at last bestowed wholeheartedly upon herself.

Malvina would have been sure to find an omen of ill clinging to the gift of the long-dead bridegroom. But then, Malvina hated to see the moon over her left shoulder, and attributed her chronic rheumatism to a careless observance of the weighty saying:

> "See a pin an' pick it up,
> All the day you'll have good luck;
> See a pin an' leave it lay,
> Bad luck'll follow you all the day."

"It's the han'somest thing I ever see in all my life," declared Miss Bennett, quite oblivious of the fact that Philura Rice heard not a word of her approving comments. "I'll make it up in a perfec'ly plain princess. It don't need a mite o' trimmin'."

XV

That same evening the Rev. Silas Pettibone sat alone in his study There was belated work to be done on the Sunday sermons; but for once the minister's trained mind refused to obey him. He was thinking with a worried frown that this was the Saturday evening he had specified, in his conversation with Elder Trimmer, as the date on which half the amount of salary due must be paid. He recalled his own words with regret, realising that he had acted under the urge of a strong and unwonted impulse. At the time his course had appeared right and proper; but more than once since he had experienced uncomfortable qualms of doubt.

Should he be compelled to take the matter up in Presbyterial conclave, as he had distinctly threatened to do, what would

be the outcome for himself? He was perilously near the "dead line," as some zealous advocate of the-young-man-in-the-pulpit idea has termed fifty years. What if he had taken the bull by the horns only to be tossed one side in the struggle. Should he lose his pulpit in Innisfield through any ill-advised effort to collect the arrears in his salary, could he — with his already silvered hair — obtain another? And if he could not, what about his approaching marriage with Miss Philura?

The thought of her warmed his chill heart like a cordial. How beautiful she had looked that day, all glorified as she was with the joys of service to others. Not even the youthful bride (in the opinion of the minister) could compare with her. His dismal cogitations gradually assumed a brighter tone. He was not old, he told himself,— even at forty-three the "dead line" was still in the perspective. And what, after all, was the "dead line"?

He gazed steadily at the hateful phantom, compelling its shrouded shape to shrink and dwindle into a kernel of wholesome truth. A man — and by a man Mr. Pettibone meant a preacher — A man might be dull and platitudinous at twenty-five. He might be spiritually ossified at thirty; at forty he might even be turning his barrel once a twelve month, compelling his congregation to subsist solely upon dry as dust dogma, gleaned years before from commentaries and man-made theologies. While at fifty he might be alive, forceful, panoplied with the whole armour of God, wielding the sword of the spirit with mighty sinews. Yes; this was the truth. Avaunt, foolish spectre of the "dead line"! Never again should it torment him.

Through the silent house rang a sudden peal of the door-bell. After a discreet interval he heard the shuffling step of his domestic on her way to answer it. Then

followed a subdued sound of voices. Mr Pettibone arose and opened the door of his study. Abby Stiles sometimes took it upon herself to debar visitors from the ministerial presence, more particularly of a Saturday evening.

On this occasion Mr. Pettibone found himself faced with a solemn delegation of five men. And for an instant his breath stopped, while his heart pounded furiously. Then with outward composure he ushered Elders Trimmer, Puffer and Swan, and Deacons Scrimger and Twombly into his study, carefully closing the door behind them, to the manifest discomfiture of Miss Stiles, who scented the unusual in this nocturnal visit.

"Ef they've come t' sass him — as is the salt of the earth, if ever there was salt — I've got my opinion of 'em," Miss Stiles muttered darkly, as she withdrew to her kitchen. "An' him a-never findin' fault with anythin' since the day I come,

an' me with constant bad luck with my bread, what with the yeast sourin' on me."

Elder Trimmer, as was right and proper, began the conversation, amid a tremendous clearing of throats and flourish of Sabbath handkerchiefs.

"— Er — we called this evening to take up that little matter of our indebtedness to you," Mr Trimmer announced, in his best prayer-meeting tone. "The Lord has been pleased to crown our efforts with a goodly measure of success."

He paused dramatically, and again the assembled dignitaries broke into what might be termed pious coughing, a distinct variety of bronchial weakness peculiar to the sanctuary.

"A goodly measure of success," repeated Mr. Trimmer oratorically. "It — er —in short occurred to some of us that at this time of the year when peace on earth, good will to men ought to prevail, we — er — should not permit any

laxity, as it were, on the walls of Zion. We have therefore put our hands to the plough and as a result I have the distinguished pleasure of handing you the whole amount due you to date and — er — a little reminder of our affection for our pastor in addition. It is — er — in the form of a check on our local bank."

Mr. Pettibone received the envelope, which Mr Trimmer tendered him, with a stately inclination of the head. He had been revolving some dignified sentences, relating to his personal sense of gratitude to Deity that his church had been blessed in this as in other particulars. But when he tried to utter these appropriate platitudes his voice quite unexepectedly failed him, and he grasped the hands outstretched to meet his from all sides, without a word.

It was Deacon Scrimger who finally voiced the general feeling, when he said in his high nasal tones:

"You ain't no better pleased t' git it an' we be t' give it, dominie. I guess we was gettin' kind o' dead in trespasses an' sins; but you roused us up jest in time. Praise the Lord!"

So once again was a mountain removed and cast into the sea, by that potent instrumentality known as faith, this time, assuredly, of the mustard seed variety.

XVI

It was exactly two weeks from the following Thursday when The Ladies' Aid and Missionary Society met at the parsonage for the purpose of sewing a new carpet for the pastor's study. Painters and paper-hangers had been at work in the house during the minister's absence, and the dingy rooms had taken on a look of brightness and cleanliness pleasing to the eye. Abby Stiles, her head swathed in a towel against dust and draughts, was busy putting things to rights, in view of the home-coming of Mr. and Mrs. Pettibone.

"Yes, Mis' Buckthorn," stated Miss Stiles, "I'm goin' t' stay right on — for a spell, anyhow, till she gets kind o' broke t' harness."

Mrs. Buckthorn paused in the act of unrolling the long breadths of carpet to

gaze darkly at Electa Pratt, who was assisting her.

"A hired girl!" this excellent lady murmured. "Well, I never! I shouldn't think Mr. Pettibone could afford it, especially now that he's married."

Miss Pratt giggled girlishly.

"Oh, I guess he c'n afford most anythin' now," was her opinion. "All Philura has t' do is 't' hold the thought.'"

"If that ain't unchristian," opined Mrs. Buckthorn, "I don't know what is! I guess the Lord of Hosts knows what is good for Philura Rice without any of her meddling."

Mrs. Puffer, a softly round and rosy matron, approached with a skein of carpet thread.

"My, wasn't she lovely! I never saw such a sweet dress."

"Satin as thick as cream," chimed in Sadie Buckthorn, waxing a length of thread vigorously.

Sadie Buckthorn was slim and rosy and eighteen; her brown eyes sparkled defiantly as she spoke.

"I think Miss Philura is just perfectly sweet!" she declared. "But I never can get used to calling her Mrs. Pettibone."

"Well, I didn't see none of it," sighed a sallow-faced woman in a black dress. "I couldn't get out no-how Thanksgivin' Day. My husban' 's mother was visiting us, an' she was took with one of her spells just as I was putting on my rubbers t' go. It was just my luck."

Mrs. Salter sighed heavily as she spoke; her "luck," as she called it, always appeared to intervene between herself and any cherished purpose.

"But of course you've heard all about it; haven't you?" asked Mrs. Puffer.

Mrs. Salter shook her head sadly.

"The' ain't a soul been near me since t' tell me anything. As I said t' mother Salter this morning, 'If I don't break my

leg on the ice this afternoon,' I says, 'mebbe I'll get out t' th' Ladies' Aid and hear the news.' An' I did come near slippin' down right in front o' th' house. I'm always so unlucky."

"I'll tell you about the wedding," volunteered Sadie Buckthorn eagerly.

She glanced about the circle of industrious women with an imperious toss of her dark head.

"In the first place," she began, "the church was full — even the gallery. And it looked dandy; the Helping Hand Circle had trimmed it with evergreen, and right down in front of the pulpit was a big gilt horn of plenty full of all sorts of fruit and vegetables."

"Oh, was that what it was meant for," put in Miss Pratt, with sly malice; "I couldn't imagine; I thought perhaps it was another collection for the pastor."

The girl reached for more thread. She longed to say something sharp and clever

and scathing; but at the moment she could think of nothing; so she merely tilted up her pink chin aggressively at Miss Pratt.

"It was a horn of plenty!" she said positively, "whether you or anybody else recognised it. It — it means abundance — plenty of everything good and rich and nice!"

"I'm sure we all hope they'll be blessed," observed Mrs. Salter plaintively. Whereat two or three of the older women wiped their eyes.

"There was plenty of sermon, anyway," pursued the lively Miss Buckthorn. "The minister from Newton preached; we girls thought he'd never stop!"

"Daughter!" intoned Mrs. Buckthorn majestically, wagging a warning finger.

"Well, it was — awfully long, and Miss Philura sitting there in the pew all that while, waiting!"

"Did you notice the cloak she had on?"

asked Mrs. Scrimger, from the opposite side of the room.

A babel of tongues uprose, and the anxious Mrs. Salter gathered with difficulty that Miss Philura's bridal gown had been concealed from the view of the congregation, "till the last minute," by a sumptuous fur-lined garment.

It was Miss Bennett, who had just entered, who added authoritatively that the cloak in question was the gift of "Genevieve's pa-an'-ma-in-law from Boston an' cost a hunderd dollars, if it cost a cent."

The little dress-maker had of a sudden become a person of distinction in Innisfield. From the pinnacle of her greatness she cast a look of complacent superiority about the circle of workers.

"You're a-puckerin' that there seam, Mis' Puffer," she observed rebukingly. "Here, you jes' let me take a-holt."

Nobody even glanced in the direction of

Sadie Buckthorn, who was humming the immortal strains of the wedding march from Lohengrin.

"I c'n jes' tell you ladies my heart was in my mouth when they come t' stan' up t' be married," declared Miss Malvina.

"Thinks s' I, if that there waist wrinkles in the back I'll feel like shuttin' up m' shop fer good an' all."

She paused, a dangling length of carpet thread in one hand, the better to enjoy the unwonted sensation of being the observed of all observers.

"'Tain't no easy job t' make a real good heavy piece of satin lay jest so. But land! I needn't 'a' worried. It fitted her like a duck's foot in the mud!"

There was quiet in the room for a full minute after Miss Bennett's last remark, while flashing needles flew in and out, and the soft staccato phrases of the wedding march roused a reminiscent tenderness in each matronly breast.

Then Sadie Buckthorn spoke softly, as if still gazing at a never-to-be-forgotten vision of exquisite happiness.

"Miss Philura's wedding gown was like her," she said; "and she seemed like — a lovely angel, just dressed for heaven."

"Daughter!" murmured Mrs. Buckthorn, with a pious upward glance.

And So They Were Married

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" 'It isn't your husband's place to do your work and his own, too, my dear' " (p. 126)

CHAPTER I

♡ ♡
♡

Dr. North's wife, attired in her dressing-gown and slippers, noiselessly tilted the shutter of the old-fashioned inside blind and peered cautiously out. The moon was shining splendidly in the dark sky, and the empty street seemed almost as light as day. It had been snowing earlier in the evening, Mrs. North observed absent-mindedly, and the clinging drifts weighed the dark evergreens on either side of the gate almost to the ground. A dog barked noisily from his kennel in a neighbouring yard, and a chorus of answering barks acknowledged the signal; some one was coming along the moonlit street. There were two figures, as Mrs. North had expected; she craned her plump neck anxiously forward as the gate clicked and a light girlish laugh floated up on the frosty air.

"Dear, dear!" she murmured, "I do hope Bessie will come right into the house.

♡ ♡

It is too cold to stand outside talking."

Apparently the young persons below did not think so. They stood in the bright moonlight in full view of the anxious watcher behind the shutter, the man's tall figure bent eagerly toward the girl, whose delicate profile Mrs. North could see distinctly under the coquettish sweep of the broad hat-brim.

"The child ought to have worn her high overshoes," she was thinking, when she was startled by the vision of the tall, broad figure stooping over the short, slight one.

Then the key clicked in the lock and the front door opened softly; the sound was echoed by the closing gate, as the tall figure tramped briskly away over the creaking snow. The neighbour's dog barked again, perfunctorily this time, as if acknowledging the entire respectability of the passer-by; all the other dogs in town responded in kind, and again there was silence broken only by the sound of a light foot on the carpeted stair.

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Mrs. North opened her door softly. "Is that you, Bessie?"

"Yes, mother."

"Isn't it very late, child?"

"It is only half past eleven."

"Did Louise go with you?"

"No, mother; she had a sore throat, and it was snowing; so her aunt wouldn't allow her to go."

"Oh!" Mrs. North's voice expressed a faint disapproval.

"Of course we couldn't help it; besides, all the other girls were there just with their escorts. You and grandma are so—old-fashioned. I'm sure I don't see why I always have to have some other girl along—and Louise Glenny of all persons! I couldn't help being just a little bit glad that she couldn't go."

"Did you have a nice time, dear?"

The girl turned a radiant face upon her mother. "Oh, we had a *lovely* time!" she murmured. "I—I'll tell you about it to-morrow. Is father home?"

"Yes; he came in early to-night and went

right to bed. I hope the telephone bell won't ring again before morning."

The girl laughed softly. "You might take off the receiver," she suggested. "Poor daddy!"

"Oh, no; I couldn't do that. Your father would never forgive me. But I told him not to have it on his mind; I'll watch out for it and answer it, and if it's Mrs. Salter again with one of her imaginary sinking spells I'm going to tell her the doctor won't be in before six in the morning. I do hope it isn't wrong to deceive that much; but your father isn't made of iron, whatever some people may think."

The girl laughed again, a low murmur of joy. "Good-night, dear little mother," she said caressingly. "You are always watching and waiting for some one; aren't you? But you needn't have worried about *me*." She stooped and kissed her mother, her eyes shining like stars; then hurried away to hide the blush which swept her face and neck.

"Dear, dear!" sighed Mrs. North, as she crept back to her couch drawn close to the

muffled telephone, "I suppose I ought to have spoken to her father before this; but he is always so busy; I hardly have time to say two words to him. Besides, he thinks Bessie is only a child, and he would have laughed at me."

The girl was taking off her hat and cloak in her own room. How long ago it seemed since she had put them on. She smoothed out her white gloves with caressing fingers. "I shall always keep them," she thought. She was still conscious of his first kisses, and looked in her glass, as if half expecting to see some visible token of them.

"I am so happy—so happy!" she murmured to the radiant reflection which smiled back at her from out its shadowy depths. She leaned forward and touched the cold smooth surface with her lips in a sudden passion of gratitude for the fair, richly tinted skin, the large bright eyes with their long curling lashes, the masses of brown waving hair, and the pliant beauty of the strong young figure in the mirror.

"If I had been freckled and stoop-shouldered

and awkward, like Louise Glenny, he *couldn't* have loved me," she was thinking.

She sank to her knees after awhile and buried her face in the coverlid of her little bed. But she could think only of the look in his eyes when he had said "I love you," and of the thrilling touch of his lips on hers. She crept into bed and lay there in a wide-eyed rapture, while the village clock struck one, and after a long, blissful hour, two. Then she fell asleep, and did not hear the telephone bell which called her tired father from his bed in the dim, cold hour between three and four.

She was still rosily asleep and dreaming when Mrs. North came softly into the room in the broad sunlight of the winter morning.

"Isn't Lizzie awake yet?" inquired a brisk voice from the hall. "My, *my!* but girls are idle creatures nowadays!"

The owner of the voice followed this dictum with a quick patter of softly shod feet.

"I didn't like to call her, mother," apologised Mrs. North. "She came in late, and——"

Grandmother Carroll pursed up her small,

wise mouth. "I heard her," she said, "and that young man with her. I don't know, daughter, but what we ought to inquire into his prospects and character a little more carefully, if he's to be allowed to come here so constant. Lizzie's very young, and——"

"Oh, grandma!" protested a drowsy voice from the pillows; "I'm twenty!"

"Twenty; yes, I know you're twenty, my dear; quite old enough, I should say, to be out of bed before nine in the morning."

"It wasn't her fault, mother; I didn't call her."

The girl was gazing at the two round matronly figures at the foot of the bed, her laughing eyes grown suddenly serious. "I'll get up at once," she said with decision, "and I'll eat bread and milk for breakfast; I sha'n't mind."

"She's got something on her mind," whispered Mrs. North to her mother, as the two pattered softly downstairs.

"I shouldn't wonder," responded Grandmother Carroll briskly. "Girls of her age are pretty likely to have, and I mistrust but what

that young Bowser may have been putting notions into her head. I hope you'll be firm with her, daughter; she's much too young for anything of that sort."

"You were married when you were eighteen, mother; and I was barely twenty, you know."

"I was a very different girl at eighteen from what Lizzie is," Mrs. Carroll said warmly. "She's been brought up differently. In my time healthy girls didn't lie in bed till ten o'clock. Many and many's the time I've danced till twelve o'clock and been up in the morning at five 'tending to my work. You indulge Lizzie too much; and if that young Bixler——"

"His name is Brewster, mother; don't you remember? and they say he comes of a fine old Boston family."

"Well, Brewster *or* Bixler; it will make no difference to Lizzie, you'll find. I've been watching her for more than a month back, and I'll tell you, daughter, when a girl like Lizzie offers to eat bread and milk for breakfast you can expect almost anything. Her mind is on

other things. I'll never forget the way you ate a boiled egg for breakfast every morning for a week—and you couldn't bear eggs—about the time the doctor was getting serious. I mistrusted there was something to pay, and I wasn't mistaken."

Mrs. North sighed vaguely. Then her tired brown eyes lighted up with a smile. "I had letters from both the boys this morning," she said; "don't you want to read them, mother? Frank has passed all his mid-year examinations, and Elliot says he has just made the 'varsity gym' team."

"Made the *what?*"

"I don't quite understand myself," acknowledged Mrs. North; "but that's what he said. He said he'd have his numerals to show us when he came home Easter."

"Hum!" murmured Mrs. Carroll dubiously; "I'm sure I hope he won't break his neck in any foolish way. Did he say anything about his lessons?"

"Not much; he never was such a student as Frank; but he'll do well, mother."

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Elizabeth North, fresh as a dewy rose and radiant with her new happiness, came into the room just as Mrs. Carroll folded the last sheet of the college letters. "I'll ask Lizzie," she said. "Lizzie, what is a g-y-m team?"

"Oh, grandma!" protested the girl, "*please* don't call me *Lizzie*. Bessie is bad enough; but *Lizzie!* I always think of that absurd old Mother Goose rhyme, 'Elizabeth, Lizzie, Betsey and Bess, all went hunting to find a bird's nest'; and, besides, you promised me you wouldn't."

"Lizzie was a good enough name for your mother," said grandma briskly. "Your father courted and married her under that name, and *he* didn't mind." Her keen old eyes behind their shining glasses dwelt triumphantly on the girl's changing colour. "You needn't tell *me!*" she finished irrelevantly.

But Elizabeth had possessed herself of the letters, and was already deep in a laughing perusal of Elliot's scrawl. "Oh, how splendid!" she cried; "he's made the 'varsity, on his ring work, too!"

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"I don't pretend to understand what particular *work* Elliot is referring to," observed grandma, with studied mildness. "Is it some sort of mathematics?"

Elizabeth sprang up and flung both arms about the smiling old lady. "You dear little hypocritical grandma!" she said; "you know perfectly well that it isn't any study at all, but just gymnastic work—all sorts of stunts, swinging on rings and doing back and front levers and shoulder stands and all that sort of thing. Elliot has such magnificent muscles he can do anything, and better than any one else, and that's why he's on the 'varsity, you see!"

"Thank you, Elizabeth," said grandma tranquilly. "I'd entirely forgotten that young men don't go to college now to study their lessons. My memory is certainly getting poor."

"No, grandma dear; it isn't. You remember everything a thousand times better than any one else, and what is more, you know it. But of course Elliot studies; he has to. Mr. Brewster says he thinks Elliot is one of the finest

boys he knows. He thinks he would make a splendid engineer. He admires Frank, too, immensely, and——"

"What does the young man think of Elizabeth?" asked Mrs. Carroll with a wise smile.

"He—oh, grandma; I—didn't mean to tell just yet; but he—I——"

"There, there, child! Better go and find your mother. I mistrust she's getting you a hot breakfast." She drew the girl into her soft old arms and kissed her twice.

Elizabeth sprang up all in a lovely flame of blushes and ran out of the room.

CHAPTER II

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When Samuel Herrick Brewster, B.S. and Civil Engineer, late of the Massachusetts School of Technology, came to Innisfield for the purpose of joining the corps of engineers already at work on a new and improved system of water-works, he had not the slightest intention of falling seriously in love. By "seriously" Sam Brewster himself might have told you—as he told his married sister living in Saginaw, Mich., and anxiously solicitous of the young man's general well-being—that he meant that sort and quality of affection which would naturally and inevitably lead a man into matrimony. He had always been fond of the society of pretty and amiable women, and well used to it, too. His further ideas with regard to matrimony, though delightfully vague in their general character, were sufficiently clear-cut and decided in one important particular, which he had been careful to

expound at length to those impetuous undergraduates of his fraternity who had appeared to need friendly counsel from their elders. "A man," said young Brewster, conclusively, "has no business to marry till he can feel solid ground under his feet. He should be thoroughly established in his profession, and well able to pay the shot."

When this sapient young gentleman first met Elizabeth North at a picnic given by the leading citizens of Innisfield to celebrate the completion of the new aqueduct he was disposed to regard her as a very nice, intelligent sort of a girl, with remarkably handsome brown eyes. On the occasion of his third meeting with the young lady he found himself, rather to his surprise, telling her about his successful work in the "Tech," and of how he hoped to "get somewhere" in his profession some day. Elizabeth in her turn had confided to him her disappointment in not being able to go to Wellesley, and her ambitious attempts to keep up with Marian Evans, who was in the Sophomore year, in literature and music. She played

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Chopin's Fantasia Impromptu for him on Mrs. North's garrulous old piano; and as her slender fingers twinkled over the yellow keys he caught himself wondering how much a first-class instrument would cost. In the course of a month he had fallen into the habit of strolling home with Elizabeth after church, and twice Mrs. North, in the kindness of her motherly heart, had asked him to dinner. She was afraid, she told Grandma Carroll, that the table board at Mrs. Bentwick's was none of the best. She spoke of him further as "that nice, good-looking boy," and hoped he wouldn't be too lonely in Innisfield, away from all his friends.

As for Dr. North, that overworked physician was seldom to be seen, being apparently in a chronic state of hastily and energetically climbing into his gig, and as energetically and hastily climbing out again. He had hurriedly shaken hands with young Brewster, and made him welcome to his house in one of the brief intervals between office hours and the ever-waiting gig, with its imperturbable brown

horse, who appeared to know quite as well as the doctor where the sick were to be found. After that, it is fair to state, the worthy doctor had completely forgotten that such a person as Samuel Herrick Brewster, B.S., C.E. existed. One may judge therefore of his feelings when his wife chose a moment of relaxation between a carefully cooked dinner and an expected summons by telephone to acquaint him with the fact of their daughter's engagement.

"*Engaged?*" exclaimed the doctor, starting out of his chair. "Bess—engaged! Oh, I guess not. I sha'n't allow anything of the sort; she's nothing but a child, and as for this young fellow—what 'd you say his name was? We don't know him!"

"You don't, you mean, papa," his wife corrected him gently. "The rest of us have seen a good deal of Mr. Brewster, and I'm sure Bessie——"

"Now, mother, what made you? I wanted to tell daddy myself. Oh, daddy, he's the dearest person in the world!" Then as Eliza-

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beth caught the hurt, bewildered look in her father's eyes she perched on his knee in the old familiar fashion. "It seems sudden—to you, I know," she murmured; "but really it isn't, daddy; as he will tell you if he can ever find you at home to talk to. Why, we've known each other since last summer!"

"I'm afraid I'm very stupid, child; but I don't believe I understand. You don't mean to tell me that you have been thinking of—of getting married and to a man I don't know even." Dr. North shook his head decidedly.

"But you do know him, daddy; he's been here ever so many times. Of course"—she added with a touch of laughing malice—"he's perfectly well, and you seldom notice well people, even when they're in your own family."

"I don't have time, Bess," admitted the doctor soberly, "there are too many of the other sort. But now about this young man—Brewster—eh? You have him come 'round in office hours, say, and I'll——"

"Now, daddy, *please* don't straighten out your mouth like that; it isn't a bit becoming.

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Naturally you've got the sweetest, kindest look in the world, and you mustn't spoil it, especially when you are talking about Sam."

The doctor pinched his daughter's pink ear. "I'm sorry to appear such an ogre," he said with a touch of grimness, "but I know too much about the world in general, and the business of getting married in particular, to allow my one daughter to go into it blindly. I'll be obliged to make the young man's further acquaintance, Bess, before we talk about an engagement."

The girl's scarlet lips were set in firm lines, which strongly resembled the paternal expression to which she had objected; she kissed her father dutifully. "I want you to get acquainted with him, daddy," she said sweetly; "but we *are* engaged."

That same afternoon Dr. North, looking worried and anxious after a prolonged conference with the village hypochrondriac, who had come to the office fully charged with symptoms of a new and distinguished disease lately imported from Europe, found himself face to

face with a tall, fresh-faced young man. This new visitor came into the office bringing with him a breath of the wintry air and a general appearance of breezy health which caused the hypochondriac to look up sourly in the act of putting on her rubbers.

"If that new medicine doesn't relieve that terrible feelin' in my epigastrium, doctor—an' I don't believe it's a-goin' to—I'll let you know," she remarked acidly. "You needn't be surprised to be called most any time between now an' mornin'; for, as I told Mr. Salter, I ain't a-goin' to suffer as I did last night for nobody."

"*Good*-afternoon, Mrs. Salter," said the doctor emphatically. "Now then, young man, what can I do for you?"

The young man in question coloured boyishly. "I shouldn't have ventured to call upon you during your office hours, Dr. North; but I understood from Elizabeth that you could be seen at no other time; so I'm here."

"Elizabeth—eh? Yes, yes; I see. I—er—didn't recall your face for the moment. Just

come into my private office for a minute or two, Mr. Brewster; these—er—other patients will wait a bit, I fancy."

The worthy doctor handed his visitor a chair facing the light, which he further increased by impatiently shoving the shades to the top of the windows. Then he seated himself and stared keenly at the young engineer, who on his part bore the scrutiny with a sturdy self-possession which pleased the doctor in spite of himself.

"Elizabeth told you of our engagement, I believe, sir?"

"She told me something of the sort—yes," admitted the doctor testily. "I said to her that I couldn't and wouldn't consider an engagement between you at present. Did she tell you that?"

"I was told that you wished to make my further acquaintance. I should like, if you have the time, to tell you something about myself. You have the right to know."

The doctor nodded frowningly. "If you expect me—at any time in the future, you un-

derstand—to give you my only daughter, I certainly am entitled to know—everything."

The young man looked the doctor squarely in the eyes during the longish pause that followed. "There isn't much to tell," he said. "My father and mother are dead. I have one sister, older than I, married to one of the best fellows in the world and living West. I made my home with them till I came to the Tech. You can ask any of the professors there about me. They'll tell you that I worked. I graduated a year ago last June. Since then I've been at work at my profession. I'm getting twelve hundred a year now; but——"

"Stop right there. Why did you ask my girl to marry you?"

"Because I loved her."

"Hum! And she—er—fancies that she loves you—eh?"

A dark flush swept over Samuel Brewster's ingenuous young face. "She does love me," was all he said. But he said it in a tone which suddenly brought back the older man's vanished youth.

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There was a short silence; then the doctor arose so abruptly that he nearly upset his chair. "*Well*," he said, "I've got to go to Boston to-morrow on a case, and I'll see those professors of yours, for one thing; I know Collins well. Not that he or anybody else can tell me all about you—not by a long shot; I know boys and young men well enough for that. But you see, sir, I—love my girl too, and I —I'll say *good*-afternoon, sir."

He threw the door wide with an impatient hand. "Ah, Mrs. Tewksbury; you're next, I believe. Walk right in."

An hour later, when the door had finally closed on his last patient, Dr. North sat still in his chair, apparently lost in thought. His dinner was waiting, he knew, and a round of visits must be made immediately thereafter, yet he did not stir. He was thinking, curiously enough, of the time when his daughter Elizabeth was a baby. What a round, pink little face she had, to be sure, and what a strong, healthy, plump little body. He could almost hear the unsteady feet toddling across the

breadth of dingy oilcloth which carpeted his office floor. "Daddy, daddy!" her sweet, imperious voice was crying, "I'm tomin' to see you, daddy!"

His eyes were wet when he finally stumbled to his feet. Then suddenly he felt a pair of warm arms about his neck, and a dozen butterfly kisses dropped on his cheeks, his hair, his forehead. "Daddy, dear, he came; didn't he? I saw him go away. I hope you weren't—cruel to him, oh, daddy!"

"No, daughter; I wasn't exactly cruel to him. But didn't the young man stop to talk it over with you?"

"No, daddy; I thought he would of course; but he just waved his hand for good-bye, and I—was frightened for fear——"

"Didn't stop to talk it over—eh? Say, I like that! To tell you the truth, Bess, I—rather like him. Good, clear, steady eyes; good all 'round constitution, I should say; and if—. Oh, come, come, child; we'd better be getting in to dinner or your mother will be anxious. But I want you to understand, miss, that your

old daddy has no notion of playing second fiddle to any youngster's first, however tall and good-looking he may be."

And singularly enough, Elizabeth appeared to be perfectly satisfied with this paternal dictum. "I knew you'd like him," she said, slipping her small hand into her father's big one, in the little girl fashion she had never lost. "Why, daddy, he's the best man I ever knew —except you, of course. He told me"—the girl's voice dropped to an awed whisper— "that he promised his mother when she was dying that he would never do a mean or dishonest thing. And—and he says, daddy, that whenever he has been tempted to do wrong he has felt his mother's eyes looking at him, so that he couldn't. Anybody would know he was good just from seeing him."

"Hum! Well, well, that may be so. I'll talk to Collins and see what he has to say. Collins is a man of very good judgment; I value his opinion highly."

"Don't you value mine, daddy?" asked Eliza-

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beth, with an irresistible dimple appearing and disappearing at the corner of her mouth.

"On some subjects, my dear," replied the doctor soberly; "but—er—on this particular one I fancy you may be slightly prejudiced."

CHAPTER III

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The question of "wherewithal shall we be clothed," which has vexed the world since its beginning in the garden "planted eastward in Eden," confronts the children of Eve so persistently at every serious crisis of life that one is forced to the conclusion that clothes sustain a very real and vital relation to destiny. Even Solomon in all his glory must earnestly have considered the colour and texture of his famous robes of state when he was making ready to dazzle the eyes of the Queen of Sheba, and the Jewish Esther's royal apparel and Joseph's coat of many colours played important parts in the history of a nation.

Elizabeth North had been engaged to be married to Samuel Brewster exactly a fortnight when the age-long question presented itself to her attention. It was perhaps inevitable that she should have thought speculatively of her wedding gown; what girl would

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not? But in the sweet amaze of her new and surprising happiness she might have gone on wearing her simple girlish frocks quite unaware of its relation to her wardrobe. She owed her awakening to Miss Evelyn Tripp.

Elizabeth had known Evelyn Tripp in a distant fashion suited to the great gulf which appeared to exist between the fashionable lady from Boston, who was in the habit of paying semi-annual visits to Innisfield, and the young daughter of the country doctor. She had always regarded Miss Tripp as the epitome of all possible elegance, and vaguely associated her with undreamed-of festivities and privileges peculiar to the remote circles in which she moved when absent from Innisfield.

Miss Tripp explained her presence in the quiet village after one formula which had grown familiar to every one. "I was *completely* worn out, my dear; I've just run away from a perfect whirl of receptions, teas, luncheons and musicales; really, I was *on the verge* of a nervous breakdown when my phy-

sician simply *insisted* upon my leaving it all. I *do* find dear, quiet Innisfield so *relaxing* after the social strain."

Miss Tripp's heavily italicised remarks were invariably accompanied by uplifted eyebrows, and a sweetly serious expression, alternating with flashing glimpses of very white teeth, and further accented by numberless little movements of her hands and shoulders which suggested deeper meanings than her words often conveyed.

Ill-natured people, such as Mrs. Buckthorn and Electa Pratt, declared that Evelyn Tripp was thirty-five if she was a day, though she dressed like sixteen; and furthermore that her social popularity in Boston was a figment of her own vivid imagination. Elizabeth North, however, had always admired her almost reverently, in the shy, distant fashion of the young, countrybred girl.

Miss Tripp was unquestionably elegant, and her smart gowns and the large picture hats she affected had created quite their usual sensation in Innisfield, where the slow-spreading

ripples of fashion were viewed with a certain stern disfavour as being linked in some vague manner with irreligion of a dangerous sort. "She's too stylish to be good for much," being the excellent Mrs. Buckthorn's severe corollary.

Miss Tripp had been among the first to press friendly congratulations upon young Brewster, who on his part received them with the engaging awkwardness of the unaccustomed bachelor.

"You are certainly the *most* fortunate of men to have won that sweet, simple Elizabeth North! I've known her since she was quite a child—since we were both children, in fact, and she was always the same unspoiled, unaffected girl, so different from the young women one meets in society circles."

"She's all of that," quoth the fortunate engineer, vaguely aware of a lack of flavour in Miss Tripp's encomium, "and—er—more."

Whereat Miss Tripp laughed archly and playfully shook a daintily gloved finger at him. "I can see that you think no one is ca-

pable of appreciating your prize; but I assure you *I do!* You shall see!" This last was a favourite phrase, and conveyed quite an alluring sense of mystery linked with vague promise of unstinted benevolences on the part of Miss Tripp. "Do you know," she added seriously, "I am told that you are closely related to Mrs. J. Mortimer Van Duser. She is a wonderful woman, so prominent in the best circles and interested in so many important charities."

Samuel Brewster shook his head. "The relationship is hardly worth mentioning," he said. "Mrs. Van Duser was a distant relative of my mother's."

"But of course you see a great deal of her when you are in Boston; do you not?" persisted the lady.

"I dined there once," acknowledged the young man, vaguely uneasy and rather too obviously anxious to make his escape, "but I dare say she has forgotten my existence by this time. Mrs. Van Duser is, as you say, a very—er—active woman."

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On the following day Elizabeth North encountered Miss Tripp on the street. She was about to pass her after a shy salutation, when Miss Tripp held out both hands in a pretty, impulsive gesture. "I was just on my way to see you, dear; but if you are going out, of course I'll wait till another day. My dear, he's *simply* perfect! and I really *couldn't* wait to tell you so. Do tell me when you are to be married? In June, I hope, for then I shall be here to help."

Elizabeth blushed prettily, her shy gaze taking in the details of Miss Tripp's modish costume. She was wondering if a jacket made like the one Miss Tripp was wearing would be becoming. "I—we haven't thought so far ahead as that," she said. Then with a sudden access of her new dignity. "Mr. Brewster expects to return to Boston in the spring. The work here will be finished by that time."

Miss Tripp's eyes brightened with a speculative gleam. "Oh, then you will live in *Boston!* How *delighted* I am to hear *that!* Did you

know your *fiancé* is related to Mrs. Mortimer Van Duser? and that he has *dined* there? *You didn't?* But of course you must have heard of Mrs. Van Duser; I believe your minister's wife is a relative of hers. But Mrs. Van Duser doesn't approve of Mrs. Pettibone, I'm told; her opinions are so odd. But I *am* so glad for you, my dear; if everything is managed properly you will have an *entrée* to the most exclusive circles." Miss Tripp's eyebrows and shoulders expressed such unfeigned interest and delight in her prospects that Elizabeth beamed and smiled in her turn. She wished confusedly that Miss Tripp would not talk to her about her engagement; it was too sacred, too wonderful a thing to discuss on the street with a mere acquaintance like Miss Tripp. Yet all the while she was rosily conscious of her new ring, which she could feel under her glove, and a childish desire to uncover its astonishing brilliancy before such warmly appreciative eyes presently overcame her desire to escape.

"Won't you walk home with me?" she asked; "mother will be so glad to see you."

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"Oh, *thank* you! Indeed I was coming to condole with your dear mother and to wish you all sorts of happiness. I've so often spoken of you to my friends in Boston."

Elizabeth wondered what Miss Tripp could possibly have said about her to her friends in Boston. But she was assured by Miss Tripp's brilliant smile that it had been something agreeable. When she came into the room after removing her hat and cloak she found her mother deep in conversation with the visitor, who made room for her on the sofa with a smile and a graceful tilt of her plumed head.

"We've been talking about you every minute, dear child. You'll see what a *sweet* wedding you'll have. Everything must be of the very latest; and it isn't a minute too soon to begin on your trousseau. You really ought to have everything hand-embroidered, you know; those flimsy laces and machine-made edges are so common, you won't *think* of them; and they don't wear a bit well, either."

Mrs. North glanced appealingly at her

daughter. "Oh," she said, in a bewildered tone, "I guess Elizabeth isn't intending to be married for a long, long time yet; I—we can't spare her."

Miss Tripp laughed airily. "*Poor* mamma," she murmured with a look of deep sympathy, "it *is* too bad; isn't it? But, really, I'm sure you're to be congratulated on your future son-in-law. He belongs to a *very* aristocratic family—Mrs. Mortimer Van Duser is a relative, you know; and dear Betty must have everything *suitable*. I'll do some pretty things, dear; I'd love to, and I'll begin this very day, though the doctor has absolutely forbidden me to use my eyes; but I simply can't resist the temptation."

Then she had exclaimed over the sparkle of Elizabeth's modest diamond, which caught her eyes at the moment, and presently in a perfumed rush of silken skirts and laces and soft furs Miss Tripp swept away, chatting to the outermost verge of the frosty air in her sweet-toned drawling voice, so different from the harsh nasal accents familiar to Innisfield ears.

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Elizabeth drew a deep breath as she watched the slim, erect figure move lightly away. She felt somehow very ignorant and countrified and totally unfit for her high destiny as a member of Boston's select circles. As a result of these unwonted stirrings in her young heart she went up to her room and began to look over her wardrobe with growing dissatisfaction.

Her mother hearing the sound of opening and shutting drawers came into the room and stood looking on with what appeared to the girl a provokingly indifferent expression on her plump middle-aged face.

"It is really too soon to begin worrying about wedding clothes, Bessie," observed Mrs. North with a show of maternal authority. "Of course"—after a doubtful silence—"we might begin to make up some new underclothes. I've a good firm piece of cotton in the house, and we can buy some edges."

The girl suddenly faced her mother, her pink lips thrust forward in an unbecoming pout. "Why, mother," she said, "don't you know

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people don't wear things made out of common cotton cloth now; everything has to be as fine and delicate as a cobweb almost, and—hand-embroidered. You can make them or buy them in the stores. Marian had some lovely things when she went to college. All the girls wear them—except me. Of course I've never had anything of the sort; but I suppose I'll have to now!"

She shut her bureau drawer with an air of finality and leaned her puckered forehead upon her hand while the new diamond flashed its blue and white fires into her mother's perplexed eyes.

"We'll do the very best we can, dear," Mrs. North said after a lengthening pause; "but your father's patients don't pay their bills very promptly, and there are the boys' college expenses to be met; we'll have to think of that."

This conversation marked the beginning of many interviews, gradually increasing in poignant interest to both mother and daughter. It appeared that "Sam," as Elizabeth now

called her lover with a pretty hesitancy which the young man found adorable, wished to be married in June, so as to take his bride with him on a trip West, in which business and pleasure might be profitably combined.

Mrs. North demurred weakly; but Dr. North was found to be on the side of the young man. "I don't believe in long engagements myself," he had said, with a certain suspicious gruffness in his tones. "I hoped we should have our daughter to ourselves for a while longer; but she's chosen otherwise, and there is no use and no need to wait. We'll have to let her go, wife, and the sooner the better, for both of them."

The important question being thus finally decided, not only Miss Tripp but the Norths' whole circle of acquaintances in Innisfield, as well as the female relations, near and far, were found ready and anxious to engage heart and soul in Elizabeth's preparations for her wedding, which had now begun in what might be well termed solemn earnest.

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"Are we going to—keep house?" Elizabeth asked her lover in the first inrush of this new tide of experience which was soon to bear her far from the old life.

"To keep house, dear, with you would be pretty close to my idea of heaven," the young man had declared with all the fervour of the inexperienced bachelor. "I've boarded for nearly six years now with barely a taste of home between whiles, and I'm tired of it. Don't you want to keep house, dear?"

And Elizabeth answered quite sweetly and truly that she did. "I can cook," she said, proud of her old-fashioned accomplishment in the light of her new happiness. "We will have just a little house to begin with, and then I can do everything."

But a suitable house of any size in Boston was found to be quite out of the question. "It will have to be an apartment, my dear," the experienced Miss Tripp declared; "and I believe I know the very one in a *really good* neighbourhood. I'll write at once. You

mustn't *think* of South Boston, even if it is more convenient for Mr. Brewster. It is so important to begin right; and you know, my dear, you couldn't expect any one to come to see you in South Boston."

Mrs. Carroll, who chanced to be present, was observed to compress her lips firmly. "Lizzie," she said, when the fashionable Miss Tripp had finally taken her departure, after much voluble advice on the subject of the going-away gown, coupled with a spirited discussion of the rival merits of a church wedding and "just a pretty, simple home affair," "if I were you I shouldn't let that Evelina Kipp decide everything for me. You'd better make up your mind what you want to do, and what you can afford to do, and then do it without asking her leave. It seems to me her notions are extravagant and foolish."

"Why, grandma!" pouted Elizabeth. "I think it is perfectly dear of Miss Tripp to take such an interest in my wedding. I shouldn't have known what to do about lots of things, and I'm sure you and mother haven't

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an idea." The girl's pretty lips curled and she moved her slim shoulders gently.

"Your mother and I both managed to get married without Miss Fripp's advice," retorted grandma tranquilly. "I may not have an 'idea,' as you call it, but I can't see why you should have ruffled silk petticoats to all your dresses. One good moreen skirt did me, with a quilted alpaca for every-day wear and two white ones for best. And as for a dozen sets of underclothes, that won't wear once they see the washtub, they look foolish to me. More than all that, your father can't afford it, and you ought to consider him."

Elizabeth looked up with a worried pucker between her girlish brows. "I don't see how I am going to help it, grandma," she sighed; "I really must have suitable clothes."

"I agree with you there, Lizzie," said Mrs. Carroll, eyeing her granddaughter keenly over the top of her spectacles; "but you aren't going to have them, if you let that Sipp girl tell you what to buy."

"It isn't *Sipp*, grandma, it's Tripp.

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T-r-i-p-p," said Elizabeth, in a long-suffering tone; "and she knows better than any one in Innisfield possibly can what I am going to need in Boston."

"You'll find the people in Boston won't take any particular interest in your petticoats, Lizzie," her grandmother told her pointedly. But the girl had spied her lover coming up the walk toward the house and had flown to meet him.

"What's the matter, sweetheart?" asked the young man, examining his treasure with the keen eyes of love. "You look tired and—er—worried. Anything wrong, little girl?"

"N-no," denied Elizabeth evasively. "Only grandma has such queer, old-fashioned ideas about—clothes. And she thinks I ought to have just what she had when she was married to grandfather fifty years ago. Of course I want to have everything nice and—suitable for Boston, you know."

"What you are wearing now is pretty enough for anywhere," declared Sam Brewster, with

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masculine obtuseness. "Don't you bother one minute about clothes, darling; you'd look lovely in anything."

Then he kissed her faintly smiling lips with the fatuous idea that the final word as to wedding finery had been said.

CHAPTER IV

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"If you can give me just a minute, Richard, before you go out." It was Mrs. North's timidly apologetic voice which broke in upon her husband's hasty preparations for a day's professional engagements.

Dr. North faced about with a laughing twinkle in his eyes. "I know your minutes, Lizzie," he said, absent-mindedly sniffing at the cork of a half-emptied bottle. "This gentian's no good; I've a mind to ship it back to Avery's and tell them what I think of the firm for selling adulterated drugs. It's an outrage on suffering humanity. I'll write to them anyway." And he began to rummage his desk in quest of stationery.

"I wanted to speak to you about Bessie's things," persisted Mrs. North. "You know you gave me some money for her wedding clothes last month; but it isn't—it won't be nearly enough."

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"What on earth have you been buying for the child?" asked her husband. "I should think with what she has already the money I gave you would go quite a ways."

"That's just it," sighed Mrs. North. "Bessie thinks none of the things she has are—suitable." She hesitated a little over the hard-worked word. "Of course living in Boston, and——"

"Pooh! Boston's no different from any other town," put in the doctor. "You tell Bess I said so. She doesn't need to worry about *Boston!*" He plumped down in his office chair and began an indignant protest addressed to the firm of Avery & Co., Wholesale Druggists and Dealers in Surgical Supplies.

"I haven't bought any of her best dresses yet," sighed Mrs. North; "and she wants an all-over lace for her wedding dress. Miss Tripp says they're very much worn now."

She paused suggestively while the doctor's pen raced busily over his page.

"You didn't hear what I said, did you, Richard?" she ventured after a while.

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"Yes, m' dear; heard every word; you were saying you'd bought Bess a lace wedding dress, and that Miss Tripp says they're very much worn," replied her husband, fixing on a stamp with a sounding thump of his big fist. "Glad to hear it. Well, I'll have to be moving now. Good-bye, m' dear; home to dinner if I can; if not——"

"If you could let me have two hundred and fifty dollars, Richard," said Mrs. North rather faintly, "we'll try to manage with that for the present."

"Well, now, Lizzie, when it comes to your wanting anything I always get it for you—if I can; and you know that; but I sent off cheques to Frank and Elliot this morning, and I'm what you'd call strapped."

"Couldn't you collect——"

The doctor kissed his wife cheerfully. "How can I, wifey, when folks leave their doctor's bills till the last cent's paid to everybody else? Don't know as I blame 'em; it's hard enough to be sick without having to pay out money for it; now, isn't it?"

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"Oh, Dick; if that isn't just like you! But I—I've thought of a way."

"Good! What is it?"

"We might—borrow some money on the house. Other people do, and——"

"Mortgage our house for wedding finery? I guess you're joking, Lizzie. At any rate, I'll call it a joke and let it pass! Good-bye!" The quick slam of the office door put a conclusive finish to the doctor's words, and his wife went back to her work on one of Elizabeth's elaborate garments with a heavy heart.

"What did Richard say?" Grandma Carroll wanted to know, when the girl had gone into another room to be fitted.

"He said he couldn't possibly let me have anything more just now," said Richard's wife with a shade of reserve in her voice. "You know, mother, people are so slow in paying their bills. The doctor has any amount outstanding if he could only get it."

"Such folks had ought to be made to pay before they get 'ary a pill or a powder, same 's they do for what made 'em sick. They'd find

money for the doctor quick enough once they had a right sharp pain from over-eating," was grandma's trenchant opinion. "But I expected he'd say that all along, and I wanted to give you this for Lizzie."

She slipped a little roll of bills into her daughter's lap. "Don't say anything to the child about it," she whispered, nodding her kind old head; "it would worry her. Besides I don't approve of the amount of money she's putting into perishable things. I meant to buy her a real good clock or a nice solid piece of furniture; but if she'd rather have lace frills that'll fall to pieces in the washtub, I'm willing she should learn by experience, same 's we've had to do before her."

Mrs. North's eyes were moist and shining. "It's what you've been putting by for years, mother," she whispered, "for——"

"Hush!" said grandma. "I guess when it comes right down to it I'm full as foolish as Lizzie. Once I set foot in the golden streets I know I sha'n't mind whether I leave a marble monument in the cemetery or not; and you

don't need to either, daughter. Now remember!"

Upon this hushed conversation entered Elizabeth in a flutter of excitement and rosy pleasure over a letter which the postman had just handed her. "It is from Evelyn Tripp," she said, "and she wants me to come to Boston and stay a week with her; she says she will help me pick out all my dresses, and I'd better have my wedding dress and my going-away gown made there, anyway. Isn't that lovely?"

Then, as she met her mother's dubious gaze, "You know Malvina Bennett hasn't a particle of style; and we don't know anything about the best places to buy things in Boston; or the dressmakers, or anything."

"I've shopped in Boston for years," said Mrs. North, with a show of firmness, "and I'm sure everything at Cooper's gives perfect satisfaction."

"Oh, *Cooper's*!" laughed the girl. "Why, mother, *dear*, nobody goes to Cooper's nowadays. It's just for country people from out of town."

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"What are we, I'd like to know?" Grandma Carroll wanted to know, with a humorous twinkle in her shrewd eyes. "I shouldn't wonder if you'd better do your shopping with your mother, Lizzie; her judgment would likely be quite as good as that Tipp girl's, and more in a line with what you can afford. You should remember that Samuel isn't a rich man, and you'll need good, substantial dresses that'll last. I remember I had a blue Russell-cord poplin when I was married that I wore for *fifteen years;* then I made it over for your mother, and she looked as pretty as a pink in it for two more; then she outgrew it and I gave it away: but the cloth in it was as good as new. A dress like that *pays!*"

Elizabeth laughed somewhat impatiently. "I've heard about that wonderful poplin ever since I can remember," she said. "I wonder you didn't save it for me. But I don't want to buy any dresses that will last for fifteen years. I'm sure Sam can buy me more dresses when I want them. I may go to Boston; mayn't I, mother?"

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Mrs. North looked wistfully at the pretty, eager face. She had looked forward with pleasure—somewhat tempered, it is true, by the knowledge of her meagre resources, yet still with pleasure—to the choosing of her daughter's wedding gown, with all its dainty accessories of tulle and lace. "I had thought of a silk muslin," she said rather faintly, "or perhaps a cream satin—if you'd like it better, dear, and——"

"I shouldn't like either of those," said the girl decidedly, "and there's so much to do that it will really save time if you don't have to bother with any of that; Evelyn (it was Evelyn and Elizabeth now) says chiffon over liberty satin would be lovely if I can't afford the lace. Of course I wouldn't buy a *cheap lace*."

That night when Dr. North came home he tossed a handful of bills into his daughter's lap. "For the wedding gown, Bess," he said; "worse luck that you want one!"

"Oh, why do you say that, you darling daddy?" murmured the girl, "when I'm going to be so happy!" She was radiantly happy

now, it appeared, and the doctor's keen eyes grew moist as he looked at her.

"Guess I was thinking about myself principally," he confessed gruffly, "and about your mother. We're going to be lonesome; and I—don't like to think of it."

The girl's bright face clouded. "The boys will be at home summers," she said, "and I'll come back to—visit often, you know. I sha'n't be far away, daddy." She clung to him for a minute without a word, a faint realisation of the irrevocable change so near at hand sweeping over her.

"Of course you *will*, Betsey Jane!" vociferated the doctor, affecting a vast jocularity for the purpose of concealing his feelings, which threatened to become unmanageable. "If you don't show up in Innisfield about once in so often I'll come to Boston with my bag and give that young robber a dose that will make his hair curl."

The next day the bride-elect journeyed to Boston carrying what appeared to her a small fortune in her little hand-bag. "You've all

been so good!" she said. "I can just buy everything I need with all this."

Evelyn Tripp met Elizabeth in South Station with open arms. "How well you are looking, you *darling!*" she exclaimed effusively. "Now if we can only keep those roses through all the shopping and dressmaking. It is *so* exhausting; but I've everything planned for you down to the last frill, and Madame Pryse has at last consented to make your gowns! If you *knew* what I've been through with that woman! She simply will *not* take a new customer; but when I mentioned the fact that you were to marry a nephew of Mrs. Mortimer Van Duser she *finally* capitulated. I could have *embraced* her!"

"But Sam isn't Mrs. Van Duser's nephew, Evelyn. I believe his mother was Mrs. Van Duser's second cousin."

"Oh, well, that doesn't signify. I'm sure, I had to say something convincing, and Mrs. Van Duser was my *dernier resort.* Pryse will do anything for you now, you'll see, my dear! And, oh, Betty dear, when I was in at Alt-

ford's yesterday I just chanced upon the most *wonderful* bargain in a lace robe, and had it sent up on approval. The most exquisite thing, and marked down from a hundred and twenty-seven dollars to—what do you think? —only eighty-nine, fifty! I was *so* pleased; for I am sure it is *just* what you want. I got samples, too, of the most bewitching silks for your dinner gown—you must have at least *one*, you know, a simple, pretty crêpe de chine or something of the sort; and then with a little frock or two for luncheons and card parties, your tailor-made—that *must* be *good*—and your wedding gown for evening affairs you will do nicely."

"But, Evelyn," interrupted Elizabeth timidly, "I'm afraid I can't— You know I didn't expect to buy but two dresses in Boston. Malvina Bennett is making me a black silk, and——"

Miss Tripp paused to smile and bow at a passing acquaintance; then she turned protesting eyes upon the girl. "You *dear* child," she murmured, "you're not to worry about a

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single thing. That's *just* what I mean to spare you. I am determined you shall have just what you are going to *need;* and if you haven't enough money with you, I can arrange everything at Altford's without a bit of trouble; and of course you will pay Pryse *her* bill when it is *perfectly* convenient for *you.* She doesn't *expect* to be paid promptly. Really, I don't believe she would have a particle of respect for a patron who insisted upon paying for a gown the minute it was finished. First-class modistes and milliners, too, are *all* that way; they know better than to send their bills too soon. So *that* needn't bother you, dear; and of course Pryse *finds* everything, which will save enormously on your outlay."

Elizabeth felt very meek and hopelessly countrified as she laid off her wraps in Miss Tripp's rather stuffy but ornate little apartment. Mrs. Tripp, a faded, apologetic person smelling of rice-powder and sachet, smiled vaguely upon her and murmured something about "Evy's wonderful taste!"

One thing at least was clear to Elizabeth as

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she lay wide-eyed in the darkness that night, after an evening spent in the confusing examination and comparison of fashion-plates and samples, and that was the conviction that the "fortune" with which she had joyfully set forth that morning had dwindled to a pitiful insufficiency before the multiplied necessities imposed upon it by Miss Tripp's undeniable taste and knowledge.

She almost wished she had chosen to do her shopping with her mother and Grandma Carroll, as she realised that she would be obliged to write home for more money. But it was too late to change her mind now; and, after all, Evelyn knew best as to what a bride about to move in polite circles in Boston would require. She went to sleep at last and dreamed of standing up to be married in a Russell-cord poplin (whatever that wonderful fabric might be) which had already done duty for fifteen years, and was "as good as new."

CHAPTER V

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As the twenty-first day of June drew on apace, Fate, in the slim, active personality of Miss Evelyn Tripp, appeared to have taken the entire North household firmly in hand. Events marched on in orderly, if surprising sequence, beginning with the issuing of the invitations bearing the name of Boston's most expensive firm of engravers on the flap of the inner envelope.

"Every one looks for that the very first thing," Miss Tripp had announced conclusively; "and one simply *couldn't* have the name of a department store or a cheap engraver!" The correct Miss Tripp shuddered at the awful picture.

"But these are so much more expensive than I had expected," demurred Mrs. North, with a worried sigh. "I had intended ordering them at Cooper's; they do them just as well there. Don't they sometimes leave off the name?"

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Miss Tripp bestowed a pitying smile upon the questioner. "Indeed they do, dear Mrs. North," she replied indulgently; "but *that* is merely a subterfuge; one always suspects the worst when there is no name. It *pays* to have the *best*."

This latter undeniable dictum was found to be entirely applicable to every detail of the forthcoming festivities, and involved such a multiplicity of expensive items that Grandma Carroll was openly indignant, and her more pliant daughter reduced to a state of bewildered apathy.

"I've been wanting to say to you for a long time, Miss Phipps, that our Lizzie isn't a fashionable girl, and that her father is a poor man and can't afford such doings," Mrs. Carroll protested in no uncertain tones. "Now I can't for the life of me see why we should have an organist from Boston to play the wedding march, when Liddy Green can do it just as well, and her feelings is going to be hurt if she doesn't; and as for a florist from Newton Centre to decorate the church, the young

folks in the Sunday-school would be glad to go to the woods after greens, and they'll put 'em up for nothing. It's going to cost enough, the land knows, but there's no use of piling up unnecessary expenses."

Miss Tripp smiled winningly upon the exasperated old lady. "*Nothing* is too good for dear Elizabeth *now*," she murmured, "and you know, dear Mrs. Carroll, that a number of Boston people will be here—Mrs. Van Duser, we *hope*, and—others."

Grandma Carroll fixed piercing eyes upon the indefatigable Evelyn. "Of course you *mean* well," she said crisply; "but if I was you I'd take a rest; I'm afraid you're getting all tuckered out doing so much. And considering that you ain't any relation I guess I'd let Lizzie's own folks 'tend to the wedding from now on."

There was no mistaking the meaning of this plain speech. For an instant Evelyn Tripp's faded cheeks glowed with mortified colour; then she recovered herself with a shrug of her elegant shoulders. Who, after all, was Mrs.

Carroll to interfere in this unwarranted manner?

"It is *so* sweet of you to think of poor little me, dear Mrs. Carroll," she said caressingly. "And indeed I *am* worn *almost* to a fringe; but I am promising myself a good, long rest after everything is over. Nothing would induce me to leave dear Elizabeth *now*. She couldn't possibly get along without me." She dropped a forgiving kiss on top of Grandma Carroll's cap and flitted away before that justly indignant lady could reply.

Miss Tripp was right. It would have been impossible for the unsophisticated Norths to have completed the arrangements for the entirely "correct" wedding which Miss Tripp had planned and was carrying through in the face of unnumbered obstacles. As to the motives which upheld her in her altruistic efforts in behalf of Elizabeth North Miss Tripp was not entirely clear. It is not always desirable, if possible, to classify and label one's actual motives, and Miss Tripp, for one, rarely attempted the task. A vague emptiness of pur-

pose, a vast weariness of the unending routine of her own somewhat disappointing career, a real, if superficial kindness of heart, and back of all an entirely unacknowledged ambition to attain to that sacred inner circle of Boston society wherein revolved the august Mrs. Mortimer Van Duser, with other lesser luminaries, about the acknowledged "hub" of the universe; toward which Miss Tripp had hitherto gravitated like a humble asteroid, small, unnoticed, yet aspiring. One of the irreproachable invitations had been duly sent to Mrs. Van Duser; but as yet there had been no visible token that it had been received.

"*Won't* you ask Mr. Brewster if he will not add a personal invitation?" entreated Miss Tripp of the bride-elect, who had appeared alarmingly indifferent when the importance of this hoped-for guest was duly set forth in her hearing. "You don't seem to *realise* what it would mean to you both to have Mrs. Van Duser present. Let me persuade him to write —or perhaps better to call; one cannot be *too* attentive to a person in her position."

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But Sam Brewster had merely laughed and pulled the little curl behind his sweetheart's ear when she spoke of Mrs. Van Duser. "Really, I don't care whether the old lady comes or not," he said, without meaning any disrespect. "She's a stiff, uncomfortable sort of person; you wouldn't like her, Betty. I went there to dinner once, and, my word, it was enough for me!"

"But," persisted Elizabeth, mindful of Miss Tripp's solemn exhortations, "if she's a relation of yours, oughtn't you to——"

"She was mother's second cousin, I believe; not much of a relation to me, you see. And seriously, little girl, we can't travel in her class at all; and we don't want to, even if we could."

"But why?" demanded Elizabeth, slightly piqued by his tone; "don't you think I am good enough?"

"You're a hundred times too good, in my opinion!" And the young engineer kissed the pouting lips with an earnestness which admitted of no teasing doubts. "It's only that

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Mrs. Van D. is rich and proud and—er—queer, and that she won't take any notice of us. I'm glad you sent her an invitation, though; that was a civil acknowledgment of a slight obligation on my side. I hope she won't send us a present, and—I don't believe she will."

The two were examining the bewildering array of glittering objects which had been arriving steadily for a week past, by mail and express; in cases left by Boston firms, and in dainty boxes tied with white ribbons from near-by friends and neighbours. The nebulous reports of Elizabeth's wedding outfit, circulated from mouth to mouth and expanding in rainbow tints as they travelled, were reflected in the shining cut glass and silver which was spread out before the wondering eyes of the young couple.

When Aunt Miranda Carroll heard that Elizabeth's trousseau included a dozen of everything (all hand-embroidered), a lace wedding-dress that cost over a hundred dollars and a pale blue velvet dinner gown lined with

taffeta, she instantly abandoned the idea she had in mind of four dozen fine cotton sheets, six dozen pillow-slips and fifty good, substantial huck towels in favour of a cut-glass punch-bowl of gigantic proportions. "It would be just the thing for parties in Boston," her daughter Marian thought.

And Uncle Caleb North, at the urgent advice of his wife (who had heard in the meantime from Aunt Miranda), exchanged his cheque for a hundred dollars for a chest of silver knives with mother-of-pearl handles. They looked so much richer than the cheque, which would have to be concealed in an inconspicuous envelope. Following the shining example of Aunt Miranda and Uncle Caleb, other relatives of lesser substance contributed cut-glass bowls and dishes of every conceivable design and for every known contingency; silver forks and spoons of singular shapes and sizes, suggesting elaborate course luncheons and fashionable dinners. While of lace-trimmed and embroidered centre-pieces and doylies there was a plenitude which would have

set forth a modest linen draper. Fragile vases, hand-painted fans, perfume bottles, silver trifles of unimagined uses, sofa pillows and gilt clocks crowded the tables and overflowed onto the floor and mantelpiece.

Elizabeth surveyed the collection with sparkling eyes. "Aren't they lovely?" she demanded, slipping her hand within her lover's arm; "and aren't you surprised, Sam, to see how many friends we have?"

"Yes, I am—awfully surprised," acknowledged the young man. His brows were drawn over meditative eyes as he examined a shining carving-set with impossible ivory handles. "What are we going to do with them all?" he propounded at length.

"Do with them? Why use them, I suppose," responded Elizabeth vaguely. "Do see these darling little cups, all gold and roses, and these coffee-spoons with enamelled handles—these make eight dozen coffee-spoons, Sam!"

"Hum!" mused the unappreciative engineer. "We might set up a restaurant, as far as coffee-spoons go."

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Elizabeth was bending rapturously over a lace fan, sewn thick with spangles. "I feel so rich with all these lovely things," she murmured. "I never dreamed of having so many."

She made such an exquisite picture in her glowing youth amid the sparkle and glitter of the dainty trifles that it is little wonder that Samuel Brewster lost his usually level head for the moment. "You ought always to have all the pretty things you want, darling," he whispered; "for you are the prettiest and sweetest girl alive."

Later in the day the ubiquitous Miss Tripp was discovered in the act of artfully concealing Mrs. Carroll's gift, made by her own faithful hands, under a profusion of lace-edged doylies lately arrived from a distant cousin. "There!" she exclaimed, with an air of relief, "those big gingham aprons and the dish-towels and dusters did look so absurd with all the other lovely things; they won't show now." And she planted a silver fern-dish in the midst and surveyed the effect with her head tilted thoughtfully. "Wasn't it *quaint* of Mrs. Car-

roll to make all those useful things? You can give them to your maid afterward; they always expect to be found in aprons nowadays—if not frocks. Really, I draw the line at frocks, with the wages one is obliged to pay; and I should advise you to."

"I'm not going to have a maid," said Elizabeth. "I can cook, and I like to."

Miss Tripp whirled about and caught the girl in her arms with an amused laugh. "You dear, romantic child!" she cried. "Did it have the *prettiest* dreams about love in a cottage, and the young wife with her sleeves rolled up cooking delicious impossibilities for a doting husband? That's all very well, my dear; but, seriously, it won't do in a Boston apartment-house. You won't have a minute to yourself after the season once begins, and of course after a while you'll be expected to entertain—quite simply, you know, a luncheon or two, with cards; possibly a dinner; you can do it beautifully with all these lovely things for your table. *I'll* help you; so don't get frightened at the idea. But *fancy* your do-

ing all that without a maid! You mustn't *think* of it! And I am sure dear Mrs. Van Duser will give you the same advice."

The soft pink in Elizabeth's cheeks deepened to rose. "Mrs. Van Duser isn't coming to the wedding," she said, in a faintly defiant tone.

"Oh! Did she send you——"

"She sent regrets," said Elizabeth coldly.

Miss Tripp's eyebrows expressed the profoundest disappointment. "I am so *sorry*," she murmured, suddenly aware that she was exceedingly weary of the North wedding. "It will *spoil everything*."

"I can't see why," returned Elizabeth with spirit, not realising that Miss Tripp's comment applied solely to her own feelings. "It won't prevent my being married to Sam; and Sam says he is glad she is not coming. She must be a stiff, pokey sort of a person, and I am sure it will be pleasanter without her. She isn't hardly any relation to Sam, anyway, and I don't think I care to know her."

"My *dear!*" expostulated Miss Tripp, "you'll see things *very* differently some day, I *hope*.

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And I am glad to say that these relationships *do* count in Boston, if not in other parts of the world, and you cannot prevent people from knowing that they exist."

Like a skilful general Miss Tripp was sweeping her field clear of her disappointment, preparatory to marshalling her forces for a new campaign. "Did Mrs. Van Duser send cards, or did she——"

"She wrote a note—a stiff, disagreeable note."

"Would you mind showing it to me, dear?"

Elizabeth produced a thick white envelope from the little embroidered pocket at her belt. "You may read it," she said; "then I mean to tear it up."

Miss Tripp bent almost worshipful eyes upon the large, square sheet. "Mrs. J. Mortimer Van Duser" (she read) "begs to convey her acknowledgments to Dr. and Mrs. North for their invitation to the marriage of their daughter, and regrets that she cannot be present. Mrs. Van Duser begs to add that she will communicate further with Mr. and

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Mrs. Samuel Brewster upon their arrival in Boston upon a matter of moment to them both."

"Isn't that a disagreeable-sounding note?" demanded Elizabeth, her pretty chin tilted at an aggressive angle. "I just know I shouldn't like her from that letter. But I'm sure I can't think what she wants to say to us 'upon our arrival in Boston.'"

"*My dear!*" exclaimed Miss Tripp, with a horrified stare, "what *can* you be thinking of? That note is in the most perfect form. I am *so* glad you showed it to me! 'Something of moment to you both,' what can it mean but a gift—perhaps a generous cheque, and *undoubtedly* a reception to introduce you. My *dear!* Mrs. Van Duser is said to be worth *millions,* and what is more, and far, *far* better, she moves in the most *exclusive* society. You dear, lucky girl, I *congratulate* you upon the recognition you have received. *Tear it up*—indeed, you will do nothing of the sort! I'll put it here right by this cut-glass vase, where every one will see it."

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Elizabeth pouted. "Mother didn't like it," she said, "and grandma laughed over it, and Sam told me to forget it; I don't see why you——"

"*Because I know*," intoned Miss Tripp solemnly. "I only hope you won't forget poor little me when you're fairly launched in Mrs. Van Duser's set."

Elizabeth gazed reflectively at her friend. "Oh, I couldn't forget you," she said; "you've been so good to me. But," she added, with what Miss Tripp mentally termed delicious naïveté, "I don't suppose we shall give many large parties, just at first."

CHAPTER VI

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"I AM of the opinion," wrote the sapient Dr. Johnson, "that marriages would in general be as happy, and often more so, if they were all made by the Lord Chancellor, upon a due consideration of the circumstances and characters, without the parties thereto having any choice in the matter."

That this radical matrimonial reform did not find favour in the eyes of his own or any succeeding generation brands it as visionary, impracticable, not to be seriously entertained, in short, by any one not a philosopher and not himself in love. But could the benevolent shade of Dr. Johnson be let into the details of a fashionable modern wedding, it is safe to predict that he might recommend a new civic function to be administered either by the Lord Chancellor, or by some equally responsible person for the purpose of regulating by sumptuary law the bridal trousseau and the wed-

ding presents. The renowed Georgian sage could not fail to recognise the relation which these too often unconsidered items bear to the welfare of the private citizen in particular and to the weal of mankind in general. And who can deny that all legislation is, or should be, centred chiefly on these very ends.

Such sober reflections as the above, though perhaps forming an unavoidable background in the minds of several of the older persons present, did not cloud the rapturous happiness of Elizabeth Carroll North, as she paced slowly up the aisle of the Innisfield Presbyterian church on the arm of her father, the folds of her "Pryse gown," as Miss Tripp was careful to designate it, sweeping gracefully behind her. The bridesmaids in pale rose-colour and the maid of honour in white; the tiny flower-girls bearing baskets of roses; the ushers with their boutonnières of orange buds; the waving palms and the sounding music each represented a separate Waterloo, fought and won by the Napoleonic Miss Tripp, who looked on, wan but self-satisfied,

"Never had there been such a wedding in Innisfield"

from a modest position in the audience. Never had there been such a wedding in Innisfield. Everybody said so in loud, buzzing whispers. Sadie Buckthorn, who was engaged to Milton Scrymger, informed her mamma that she should be married in church in October, and that her bridesmaids should wear yellow. And Bob Garrett, a clerk in a Boston department store, told his sweetheart that he guessed the wedding was about their speed, and added that he knew a swell floor-walker who would look simply great as best man.

As for the young couple chiefly concerned they might have walked on air instead of on the roses strewed in their path by the little flower-girls; and the hundreds of curious eyes fastened upon them were as dim, painted eyes upon a tapestried wall. They only saw each other and the gate of that ancient Eden of the race opening before them.

That same evening, after all was over, and when, as the village reporter phrased it with happy originality, "the young couple had departed upon their wedding journey amid

showers of rice and roses," Dr. North sought his tired wife, busy clearing away the tokens of the late festivities.

"Come, Lizzie," he said kindly, "we may as well get what rest we can; to-morrow 'll be another day, and we've got to go jogging on about our middle-aged business as usual."

Mrs. North looked up at him with tearful eyes. "I can't seem to realise that Bessie's gone to stay," she said tremulously. "I just caught myself thinking what I'd say to her when she came home, and what we'd——"

Richard North passed his arm about the wife of his youth. "I—hope he'll be good to her," he said, his voice shaken with feeling. "I—I believe he's all right. If he isn't I'll—" He shrugged his broad shoulders impatiently.

"Oh, I'm not a bit worried about *Sam*," said Mrs. North; "I know enough about men. But, O Dick, I'm going to miss my—baby!"

He held her close for a minute while she sobbed on his shoulder; then the two went slowly up the stairs together, leaving the dis-

ordered rooms and the fading roses in the luminous dark of the June night.

The Boston apartment to which young Samuel Brewster brought his bride in the early part of September was of Miss Evelyn Tripp's choosing. The engineer had demurred at its distance from his work, but Elizabeth had said she preferred to be near Evelyn; and Evelyn said that the location, if not strictly fashionable, was at least *near* the people they ought to know.

The rent was thirty-eight dollars a month. And the rooms were small, inconvenient and old-fashioned. "But," as Miss Tripp kindly pointed out, "if one is obliged to choose between a small, old-fashioned suite in a really good locality and a light airy one in the unfashionable suburbs of South Boston one *ought* not to hesitate."

Mrs. North and Grandma Carroll had seen to putting the furnishings in place; and when the two arrived at the close of a hot afternoon they found everything in the exquisite

order with which Elizabeth had been happily familiar all her life.

She ran from room to room laughing and crying in the same breath. "Oh, Sam, dear; do see, there is ice in the refrigerator and a cunning little jar of cream and a print of butter; and here is a roast chicken and some of grandma's rolls and one of mother's delicious lemon pies! How hard they must have worked. I'll put on one of these big aprons, and we'll have supper in no time!"

And Sam Brewster, as he watched his wife's pretty little figure moving lightly about her new kitchen, heaved a mighty sigh of content. "It seems almost too good to be true!" he murmured. "And to think it is for always!"

It was not until they had eaten their first blissful meal together, and had washed the dishes, also together, in the dark little kitchen —an operation in which the young engineer covered himself with glory in his masterly handling of the dish-towel—that Elizabeth discovered a large square envelope, bearing the Van Duser crest, and addressed to herself.

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She opened it in the circle of Sam's arms, as the two reposed on their one small sofa in the room bearing the dignified title of reception hall.

"Why—what in the name of common sense is she giving us?" was Sam Brewster's startled exclamation as his quick eye took in the contents of the sheet.

"I—I don't understand," gasped Elizabeth, growing hot and cold and faint, "I can't think—how it could have happened."

Yet Mrs. Van Duser's words, though few, were sufficiently succinct. They were inspired, as she afterward confided to her rector, Dr. Gallatin, by the most altruistic sentiments of which the human heart is capable. "Truth," Mrs. Van Duser had enunciated majestically, "never finds itself at a loss. And in administering so just a rebuke to a young person manifestly appointed to fill a humble station in life I feel that I am in a measure assuming the prerogatives of Providence."

In this exalted rôle Mrs. Van Duser had written to Elizabeth North, whose miserable,

shamed eyes avoided those of her husband after she had realised its contents. The letter enclosed a bill for one hundred and twenty-five dollars from Madame Léonie Pryse, for the material, making and findings for one blue velvet reception gown. There was a pencilled note attached, to the effect that as Madame Pryse had been referred to Mrs. Van Duser, she begged to present the bill, with the hope that it would be settled at an early date. Mrs. Van Duser's own majestic hand had added a brief communication, over which the young engineer scowled fiercely. He read:

"As Mrs. Brewster's personal expenses, either before or after her marriage, can have no possible interest for Mrs. Van Duser, Mrs. Van Duser begs to bring to Mrs. Brewster's attention the enclosed statement. Mrs. Van Duser wishes to inform Mrs. Brewster that she has taken the pains to send for the tradeswoman in question, and that she has elicited from her facts which seem to show an entire misapprehension of the commoner ethical requirements on the part of the person addressed.

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"Mrs. Van Duser begs to add in the interests of society at large and of the person in whom, as a distant relative, she has interested herself somewhat, that she distinctly frowns upon all extravagance. Mrs. Van Duser trusts that this communication, which she begs to assure Mrs. Brewster is penned in a spirit of Christian charity, will effectually prevent further errors on the part of so young and inexperienced a person as Mrs. Brewster appears to be."

"Well?" Samuel Brewster's blue eyes, grown unexpectedly keen and penetrating, rested questioningly upon his bride.

"Don't look at me like that—please, Sam!" faltered Elizabeth. "I—I didn't mean to buy that dress: truly I didn't. I had paid for all the others, and I had twenty-seven dollars left, and Evelyn told me that Madame Pryse had a—a remnant of blue velvet which she would make up for me for a song. And—I—let her do it. I thought she would send the bill to me, and I would——"

"Did she send it to you?"

"Y-yes, twice. But Evelyn said for me not

to worry. She said Madame Pryse's customers never paid her right away, and there was so much else—just at the last, I didn't like to ask daddy; Uncle Caleb always gives me fifty dollars for my birthday, and I thought—" Elizabeth's voice had grown fainter as she proceeded with her halting explanations. But she started up with a little cry, "Oh, Sam! what are you going to do?"

For her husband was examining the bill with an expression about his mouth which she had never seen there before. "I don't see that you have been credited with the twenty-seven dollars," he said quietly. Then with a sorry attempt at a smile, "These *mesdames* appear to pile up the items sky-high when it comes to building a gown; better have a cast-iron contract with 'em, I should say, and pay up when the job's finished."

Elizabeth's tear-stained face was hidden on her husband's shoulder. "I—I spent the twenty-seven dollars for—for gloves," she confessed. "Evelyn said I didn't have enough long—ones."

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"*Confound Evelyn!*" said the young man strongly. "Come, Betty, dear, you're not to let this thing bother you, it isn't worth it. I'll pay this bill to-morrow. It's lucky I've the money in the bank; and I'll write to Mrs. Van D., too." He clenched his fist as though he would like to use something more powerful than his pen.

"But, Sam, you oughtn't to—I can't let you pay—for——"

"Well, I guess I can buy my wife a dress if I want to, and that blue velvet's a stunner. You haven't worn it yet, have you, dear? but when you do you'll look like a posy in it. Come, sweetheart, this was a tough proposition, I'll admit, but don't you let it bowl you over completely. And, Betty, you won't tell the Tripp lady about it, will you? I—er—couldn't stand for that, you know."

Elizabeth stole one look at the strong, kind face bent toward her. For the first time, though happily not for the last, she was realising the immense, the immeasurable comfort to be found in her husband's love. "I'll never

—do such a thing again," she quavered. "I knew all the time I was being extravagant; but I didn't expect—I never supposed——"

"You couldn't very well have foreseen the Pryse woman's astonishing business methods, nor Mrs. Van D.'s Christian forbearance." His tone was bitter as he spoke the last words. "But what I can't seem to understand is how that bill ever found its way to my esteemed sixteenth cousin."

Elizabeth's eyes overflowed again. "I'm afraid it was Evelyn," she stammered. "She —told Madame Pryse that you—were Mrs. Van Duser's nephew."

Sam Brewster whistled. Then he fell into a fit of revery so prolonged that Elizabeth nestled uneasily in the strong circle of his arm. He was reviewing the events of the immediate past in the cold light of the present, and the result was not altogether complimentary to Miss Tripp.

"I say, little girl," he said at length, looking down at the tear-stained face against his shoulder, "I don't want to be disagreeable, but

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—er—I can't for the life of me see why Miss Tripp should interest herself so—intimately —in our affairs. Don't you think you might —er—discourage her a bit?"

Elizabeth sighed reminiscently. "I wouldn't hurt Evelyn's feelings for the world," she said, "but I—I'll try."

CHAPTER VII

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The very next morning as Elizabeth was engaged in putting the finishing touches upon the arrangements of her new home, with all the keen delight of nest-building, so strong in some women and so utterly lacking in others, Miss Evelyn Tripp was announced, and a moment later stepped airily from the laborious little elevator. "Oh, here you are *at last*, you *darling* girl!" she exclaimed, clasping and kissing Elizabeth with *empressement*. "I knew you were expected last night—indeed, I was here all the morning helping, but as I told your mother and that dear, quaint grandmamma of yours, I wouldn't have intruded upon your very first evening *for the world!* How delightfully well and pretty you are looking, and isn't this the *sweetest* little place? and oh! I nearly forgot, *did* you find Mrs. Van Duser's note? I assure you I pounced upon *that*, and took good care to put it where you

would both see it the *very* first thing. I don't mind confessing that I am simply devoured with *curiosity*. *Was* it a cheque, dear? And *is* she going to do something nice for you in a social way?"

Elizabeth's cheeks burned uncomfortably. "It was only a—a friendly—at least I think —I am sure she meant it to be a friendly letter. She said so, anyway. Sam put it in his pocket and took it away with him," she made haste to add, forestalling the urgent appeal in Miss Tripp's luminous gaze.

"Well, I am sure that was *most* sweet and gracious of Mrs. Van Duser. Didn't you find it so, my dear? So *dear* of her to personally welcome you to *Boston!* You'll call, of course, as soon as she returns from her country place. She will expect it, I am sure; such women are *most* punctilious in their code of social requirements, and you can't be *too* careful not to offend. You'll forgive me for saying this much, won't you, dear?"

Elizabeth was conscious of a distinct sense of displeasure as she met Miss Tripp's anx-

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iously solicitous eyes. "You are very good, Evelyn," she said, "but Sam—Mr. Brewster —thinks it will be best for us not to—" She paused, her candid face suffused with blushes. "I'd—prefer not to talk about Mrs. Van Duser, if you please. We don't *ever* expect to go and see her."

The tactful Miss Tripp looked sadly puzzled, but she felt that it would not be the part of wisdom to press the issue for the moment. Her face wreathed itself anew in forgiving smiles as she flitted about the little rooms. "*Isn't* this the most convenient, cosy little apartment?" she twittered. "I am *so* glad I was able to secure it for you; I assure you I was obliged to use all of my diplomacy with the agent. And your pretty things *do* light up the dark corners so nicely. And speaking of corners somehow reminds me, I have found you a *perfect treasure* of a maid; but you must take her at once. She's a cousin of our Marie, and has always been employed by the best people. She was with Mrs. Paget Smythe last, I believe. She told Marie last night that

she would be willing to come to you for only twenty dollars a month, and that's *very* reasonable, considering the fact that she is willing to do part of the laundry work,—the towels, sheets and plain things, you know. *Expensive?* Indeed it's not, dear—for *Boston.* Why, I could tell you of plenty of people who are *glad* to pay twenty-five and put all their laundry out. I'd advise you to engage Annita without delay. Really, you couldn't do better."

Elizabeth shook her head. "I mean to do my own work," she said decidedly. "I shall want something to do while Sam is away, and why not this when I—like it?"

"But you won't like it after a while, my poor child, when the shine is once worn off your new pans and things, and *think* of your hands! It's absolutely impossible to keep one's nails in any sort of condition, and besides the heat from the gas-range is simply *ruinous* for the complexion. Didn't you *know* that? Of course you are all milk and roses now, but how long do you suppose that will last, if you

are to be cooped up in a hot, stuffy little kitchen from morning till night?" Miss Tripp paused dramatically, her eyes wide with sympathy and apprehension.

"But we—I am sure we oughtn't to afford to keep a maid," demurred Elizabeth in a small, weak voice. "So please don't——"

"Oh, of course, it is nothing to me, my dear," and Miss Tripp arose with a justly offended air. "I *thought* I was doing you a kindness when I asked Annita to call and see you this morning. It will be perfectly easy for you to tell her that you don't care to engage her. But when it comes to *affording*, *I* think you can scarcely afford to waste your good looks over a cooking range. It is your duty to your husband to keep yourself young and lovely as long as you possibly can. It is only *too* easy to lose it all, and then—" Miss Tripp concluded her remarks with a shrug of her shapely shoulders, which aroused the too impressionable Elizabeth to vague alarms.

"I am sure," faltered the bride of two months,

"that Sam would like me just as well even if I——"

"Of course you *think* so, dear, every woman does till it is *too late*," observed Miss Tripp plaintively. "I'm sure I *hope* it will turn out differently in your case. But I could tell you things about some of my married friends that would— Well, all I have to say is that *I* never dared try it—matrimony, I mean—and if I were in your place— But there! I *mustn't* meddle. I solemnly promised myself years and years ago that I wouldn't. The trouble with me is that I love my friends *too* fondly, and I simply cannot endure to see them making mistakes which might *so easily* have been avoided. I'm coming to take you out to-morrow, and we'll lunch down town in the nicest, most inexpensive little place. And —*dear*, if you finally decide *not* to engage Annita, *would* you mind telling her that through a *slight misunderstanding* you had secured some one else? These high-class servants are *so easily* offended, you know, and on account of *our Marie*—a perfect *treasure*—

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Oh, *thank* you! *Au revoir*—till to-morrow!"

Perhaps it is not altogether to be wondered at that immediately after Miss Tripp's departure Elizabeth found occasion to glance into her mirror. Yes, she was undoubtedly prettier than ever, she decided, but suppose it should be true about the withering heat of the gas-range; and then there were the rose-tinted, polished nails, to which Elizabeth had only lately begun to pay particular attention. The day's work had already left perceptible blemishes upon their dainty perfection. Elizabeth recalled her mother's hands, marred with constant household labour, with a kind of terror. Her own would look the same before many years had passed, and would Sam—*could* he love her just the same when the delicate beauty of which he was so fond and proud had faded? And what, after all, was twenty dollars a month when one looked upon it as the price of one's happiness?

Elizabeth sat down soberly with pencil and paper to contemplate the matter arithmeti-

cally. Thirty-eight dollars for rent, and twenty dollars for a maid, subtracted from one hundred and twenty—the latter sum representing the young engineer's monthly salary—left an undeniable balance of sixty-two dollars to be expended in food, clothing and other expenses. After half an hour of careful calculation, based on what she could remember of Innisfield prices, Elizabeth had reached very satisfactory conclusions. Clothing would cost next to nothing—for the first year, at least, and food for two came to a ridiculously small sum. There appeared, in short, to be a very handsome remainder left over for what Sam called "contingencies." This would include, of course, the fixed amount which they had prudently resolved to lay by on the arrival of every cheque. This much had already been settled between them. Sam had a promising nest-egg in a Boston bank, and both had dreams of its ultimate hatching into a house and lot, or into some comfortable interest-bearing bonds. Elizabeth was firmly resolved to be prudent and helpful to her husband in

every possible way; but was it not her duty to keep herself young and lovely as long as possible? The idea so cogently presented to her attention by Miss Tripp not an hour since appeared to have become so much her own that she did not recognise it as borrowed property.

It was at this psychological instant that a second summons announced the presence of a certain Annita McMurtry in the entrance hall below. "Did Mrs. Brewster wish to see this person?"

Elizabeth hesitated for the fraction of a minute. "You may tell her to come up," was the message that finally found its way to the hall-boy's attentive ear.

Annita McMurtry was a neatly attired young woman, with a penetrating black eye, a ready smile and a well-poised, not to say supercilious bearing. In response to Elizabeth's timid questions she vouchsafed the explanation that she could "do everything" and was prepared "to take full charge."

"And by that you mean?"

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"I mean that the lady where I work doesn't have to worry herself about anything. I take full charge of everything—ordering, cooking, laundry and waiting on table, and I don't mind wiping up the floors in a small apartment like this. Window-cleaning and rugs the janitor attends to, of course."

"When—could you come, if I—decide to engage you?" asked Elizabeth, finding herself vaguely uncomfortable under the scrutiny of the alert black eyes.

"If you please, madam, I'd rather speak first about wages and days out. I'd like my alternate Thursdays and three evenings a week; and will you be going to theatres often with supper parties after? I don't care for that, unless I get paid extra. I left my last place on account of it; I can't stand it to be up all hours of the night and do my work next day."

"I should think not!" returned Elizabeth, with ready sympathy. "We should not require anything of the sort. As to wages, Miss Tripp said you would be willing to come for twenty dollars. It seemed very high to

me for only two in the family." Elizabeth spoke in a very dignified way; she felt that she appeared quite the experienced housekeeper in the eyes of the maid, who was surveying her with a faint, inscrutable smile.

"I never work for a family where there is more than two," said Miss McMurtry pointedly. "I could make my thirty-five a month easy if I would. But Miss Tripp must have misunderstood me; twenty-two was what I said, but you'll find I earn it. I'll come to-morrow morning about this time, and thank you kindly, madam." The young woman arose with a proud composure of manner, which put the finishing touch upon the interview, and accomplished her exit with the practised ease of a society woman.

"I wonder if I ought to have done it? And what will Sam say?" Elizabeth asked herself, ready to run undignifiedly after the girl, whose retiring footsteps were already dying away down the corridor. But Sam was found to be of the opinion that his Elizabeth had done exactly right. He hadn't thought of hiring a

servant, to be sure, but he ought, manifestly, to have been reminded of his omission. It was surely not to be expected that a man's wife should spend her time and strength toiling over his food in a dark little den of a kitchen. No decent fellow would stand for that sort of thing. He wanted his wife to have time to go out, he said; to enjoy herself; to see pictures and hear music. As for the expense, he guessed they could swing it; he was sure to get another rise in salary before long. And much more of the same sort, all of which proved pleasantly soothing to Elizabeth's somewhat disturbed conscience.

"I suppose Grandma Carroll would say I was a lazy girl," she sighed.

"You didn't marry Grandma Carroll, dear," Sam told her, with a humorous twinkle in his eyes which Elizabeth thought delightfully witty.

CHAPTER VIII

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WHATEVER the opinion of the unthinking many on the subject of honest work as related to the happiness of the individual, there can be but one just conclusion as to the effect of continued idleness, whether it be illustrated in the person of the perennially tired gentleman who frequents our back doors at certain seasons of the year, or in the refined woman who has emptied her hands of all rightful activities.

At the end of her first week's experience with her new maid Elizabeth found herself for the first time in her wholesome, well-ordered life at a loss for something to do. When Miss McMurtry stated that she would take full charge of Mrs. Brewster's ménage she meant what she said, and Elizabeth's inexperienced efforts to play the rôle of mistress, as she had conceived it, met with a civil but firm resistance on the part of the maid.

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"Yes, Mrs. Brewster, I had expected to wipe up the dining-room floor this morning, after I have finished my kitchen work," she would announce frostily, in response to Elizabeth's timid suggestion. "I have my regular days for things, an' I don't need to be told. I've already spoken to the janitor's boy about the rugs, an' you'll please to leave some money with me to pay him. Just put it on the kitchen dresser." And "No, madam, I shall not have time to make an apple-pie this morning; I generally order pastry of the baker when it's called for. Yes, Mrs. Brewster, those were baker's rolls you had on the breakfast-table. I ordered the man to stop regularly. You prefer home-made bread, you say? I'm sorry, but I never bake. It is quite unnecessary in the city."

The young woman's emphasis on the last word delicately conveyed her knowledge of Mrs. Brewster's country origin, and her pitying disapproval of it.

Miss Tripp, to whom Elizabeth confided her new perplexities, merely laughed indulgently.

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"You mustn't interfere, if you want Annita to stay with you," she counselled. "Just keep religiously out of your kitchen, my dear, and everything will go on peacefully. We never think of such a thing as dictating to Marie, and we're careful not to make *too* many suggestions. Of course you don't know what a perfectly *dreadful* time people are having with servants here in town. My *dear*, I could tell you things that would frighten you! Just fancy having your prettiest *lingerie* disappear bit by bit, and your silk stockings worn to rags, and not *daring* to say a word!"

"I have lost two handkerchiefs since Annita came," said Elizabeth doubtfully.

"Oh, *handkerchiefs,* nobody expects to keep those forever. Really, do you know when I treat myself to a half dozen new ones I conceal them from Marie as long as I possibly can, for fear she'll decide I have too many."

Elizabeth's artlessly inquiring gaze provoked another burst of well-bred merriment. "You dear little innocent, you *do* amuse me so! Don't you see our good Marie doesn't propose

to encourage me in senseless extravagance in laundry; you see there is no telling to what lengths I might go if left to myself, and it all takes Marie's time. No, I don't pretend to know what she does with them all. Gives them to her relations, perhaps. She *couldn't* use them all, and I give her a half dozen at Christmas every year. Why, they're all that way, and both Marie and Annita would draw the line at one's best silk stockings, I am sure. We think Marie *perfectly honest;* that is to say, I would trust her with everything I have, feeling sure that she would use her discretion in selecting for herself only the things I ought not to want any longer. *They know*, I can tell you, and they despise parsimonious people who try to make their old things do forever. You may as well make up your mind to it, my dear, and when you are fortunate enough to secure a really good, competent servant like Annita, you *mustn't* see *too* much."

Just why Elizabeth upon the heels of this enlightening conversation should have elected to purchase for herself two new handkerchiefs

of a somewhat newer pattern than the ones she had lost was not entirely clear even to herself.

There had been a new, crisp bill in her purse for a number of weeks nestling comfortably against the twin gold pieces her father had given her on the day of her wedding. Sam had put it there himself, and had joked with her on her economical habits when he had found it unbroken on what he laughingly called her next pay day. "Seriously, though, little wife of mine, I never want you to be out of money," he had said; "if I am cad enough to forget you mustn't hesitate to remind me. And you need never feel obliged to tell me what you've done with it."

This wasn't the ideal arrangement for either; but neither husband nor wife was aware of it, nor of the fact that in the small, dainty purse which lay open between them lurked a possible danger to their common happiness. Elizabeth had been brought up in the old-fashioned way, her wants supplied by her careful mother, and an occasional pocket-piece by her overworked

father, who always referred to the coins transferred from his pocket to her own as "money to buy a stick of candy with." The sum represented by the twin gold pieces and the crisp bills appeared to contain unlimited opportunities for enjoyment. A bunch of carnations for the dining table and a box of bonbons excused the long stroll down Tremont Street, during which Miss Tripp carried on the education of her protégée on subjects urban without interruption.

"If I had only thought to stop at the bank this morning," observed Miss Tripp regretfully, "I should simply have insisted upon your lunching with me at Purcell's; then we might have gone to the matinée afterward; there is the dearest, brightest little piece on now—'Mademoiselle Rosette.' You haven't heard it? What a pity! This is the very last matinée. Never mind, dear, I sha'n't be so thoughtless another day."

"But why shouldn't I—" began Elizabeth tardily; then with a deep blush. "I have plenty of money with me, and I should

be so happy if you would lunch with me, and——"

"My dear, I couldn't *think* of it! I *mustn't* allow you to be extravagant," demurred Miss Tripp. But in the end she yielded prettily, and Elizabeth forthwith tasted a new pleasure, which is irresistibly alluring to most generous women.

That evening at dinner her eyes were so bright and her laughing mouth so red that her young husband surveyed her with new admiration. "What did you find to amuse you today in this big, dull town?" he wanted to know.

"It isn't dull at all, Sam, and I've had the loveliest time with Evelyn," she told him, and added a spirited account of the opera seen with the unjaded eyes of the country-bred girl. "I've never had an opportunity to go to theatres and operas before," she concluded, "and Evelyn thinks I ought to see all the best things as a matter of education."

"I think so too," beamed the unselfish Sam, "and I hope you'll go often now that you have the chance."

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"I may as well, I suppose, now that I have Annita," Elizabeth said. "It's dreadfully dull here at home when you are gone. I've nothing to do at all."

Sam pinched her pink ear gently as the two strolled away from the table. "How does the new kitchen mechanic suit you?" he asked. The meat had been overdone, the vegetables watery and the coffee of an indifferent colour and flavour, he thought privately.

"Why, she seems to know exactly what to do, and when to do it," Elizabeth said rather discontentedly, "and she's very neat; but did you like that custard, Sam? I thought it was horrid; I'm sure she didn't strain it, and it was cooked too much."

"Since you put it to me so pointedly, I'm bound to confess that the present incumbent isn't a patch on the last lady who cooked for me," confessed her husband, laughing at the puzzled look in her eyes.

"Oh, you mean me! I'm glad you like my cooking, Sam. I should feel dreadfully if you didn't. But about Annita, I am afraid she

won't allow me to teach her any of the things I know; and when I said I meant to make a sponge-cake this morning, she said she was going to use the oven. But she wasn't, for I went out and looked afterward. Then she said right out that she wasn't used to having ladies in her kitchen, and that it made her nervous."

"Hum!" commented the mere man; "you'd better ask your father to prescribe for the young person; and in the meanwhile I should frequent 'her kitchen' till she had gradually accustomed herself to the idea."

"She would leave if I did that, Sam."

"There are others."

"Not like Annita," objected Elizabeth, with the chastened air of a three-dimensioned experience. "You've no idea of the dreadful times people have with servants here in Boston. And, really, one oughtn't to expect an angel to work in one's kitchen for twenty-two dollars a month; do you think so, Sam?"

Her uplifted eyes and earnest lips and rose-tinted cheeks were so altogether charming as

she propounded this somewhat absurd question that Sam said, "Speaking of angels puts me in mind of the fact that I have one right in hand," and much more of the good, old-fashioned nonsense which makes the heart beat quicker and the eyes glow and sparkle with unreasoning joy when the heart is young.

Half an hour had passed in this agreeable manner when Elizabeth bethought herself to ask, "What had I better do about the butcher's and grocer's slips, Sam dear? Annita says that in all the places where she has worked they always run bills; but if we aren't to do that——"

"And we're not, you know; we agreed about that, Elizabeth?"

"Yes, of course; but Annita brought me several when I came in to-day; I had forgotten all about them. Do you think I ought to stay at home every day till after the butcher and grocer and baker have been here? Sometimes they don't call till after twelve o'clock."

This was manifestly absurd, and he said so emphatically. The result of his subsequent

cogitations was an order to Annita to leave the slips on his desk, where they would be attended to each evening. "Mind," he said, "I don't want Mrs. Brewster annoyed with anything of the sort."

"Indeed, sir, I can see that Mrs. Brewster has not been used to being worrited about anything, an' no more she ought," the young woman had replied with an air of respectful affection for her mistress which struck Sam as being no less than admirable. It materially assisted him in his efforts to swallow Annita's muddy coffee of a morning and her leaden puddings at night. All this, while Elizabeth light-heartedly entered upon what Miss Tripp was pleased to call her "first Boston season."

There was so much to be learned, so much to be seen, so much to enjoy; and the new gowns and hats and gloves were so exactly the thing for the matinées, teas, card-parties and luncheons to which she found herself asked with unlooked-for cordiality. She could hardly have been expected to know that her open sesame to even this circle without a circle consisted in a

low-voiced allusion to the sidereally remote Mrs. Van Duser, "a connection by marriage, my dear."

It was on a stormy afternoon in late February when Dr. North, unannounced and disdaining the noisy little elevator, climbed the three flights of stairs to his daughter's apartment and tapped lightly on the corridor door. His summons was answered by an alert young woman in a frilled cap and apron. Mrs. Brewster was giving a luncheon, she informed him, and could see no one.

"But I am Mrs. Brewster's father, and she'll want to see me," the good doctor had insisted, sniffing delicately at the odours of salad and coffee which floated out to him from the gingerly opened door. "Go tell your mistress that Dr. North is here and would like to see her."

In another minute a fashionable little figure in palest rose-colour had thrown two pretty lace-clad arms about his neck. "Oh, you dear, old darling daddy! why *didn't* you let me know you were coming? Now I've this

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luncheon party, with bridge after it, and I can't— But you must come in and wait; I'll tuck you away somewhere—in my bedroom, or——"

"I can't stay, Bess—at least not long. I've a consultation at the hospital at three. But I'll tell you, I'll be back at five; how'll that do? I've a message from your mother, and——"

Elizabeth shrugged her shoulders distractedly. "They won't go a minute before six," she said; "but come then—to dinner. Be sure now!"

The doctor was hungry, he had had no lunch, and despite the warmth of his welcome there was a perceptible chill about his aging heart as he slowly made his way down the stairs.

"I'm afraid I'll not be able to make it," he told himself; "my train goes at six-fifty, and —bless me! I've just time for a bite at a restaurant before I'm due at the hospital."

CHAPTER IX

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A LOVING letter from his daughter followed Dr. North to Innisfield. In it Elizabeth had described her disappointment in not being able to see more of her darling daddy. They had waited dinner for him that night, she said, and Sam was dreadfully put out about it. "He *almost* scolded me for not bringing you right in. But how could I, with all those women? You wouldn't have enjoyed it, daddy dear; I know you too well. Next time—and I hope it will be soon—you must telephone me. We have a 'phone in our apartment now, and I'm sure I don't know how we ever lived without it. You see I have so many engagements that even if I didn't happen to be entertaining, I might not be at home, which would be just as bad."

The rest of the sheet was filled with a gay description of the automobile show, which was "really quite a function this year," and of her

success as a hostess. "Evelyn says I've made immense progress, and she's quite proud of me."

There was a short silence as Mrs. North folded the letter and slipped it into its envelope.

"But I don't understand why you didn't go back and take dinner with them, as Bessie asked you to do," she said at last, in a reproachful tone. "You ought to have made an effort, Richard."

The doctor's grizzled brows lifted humorously as he glanced across the breakfast table at his wife's worried face. "Ought to have made an effort—eh?" he repeated. "Well, didn't I? I wanted to see Bess the worst way, but it seems she didn't want to see me—at least not at the time I arrived. So I went my way, got my lunch, met Grayson at the hospital at two-thirty, finished the operation at four, ran over to Avery's and left an order, then——"

"But why——"

"I could have gone back to Bess then, and I

wanted to; but she didn't invite me to come till six, and I knew I must make that six-twenty train, for I'd promised Mrs. Baxter I'd call in the evening. So you see, my dear, I was up against it, as the boys say."

"Did she look well, Richard?" asked his wife anxiously.

"Perfectly well, I should say."

"And did she tell you when we might expect her at home for a little visit?"

The doctor shook his head. "I didn't have a chance to ask any questions, my dear." He arose and pushed back his chair. "Well, I must be going. When you write to Bess tell her it's all right, and she's not to worry. I'll take care to let her know next time I'm coming." He went out and closed the door heavily behind him.

Grandma Carroll, who had listened to the conversation without comment, pursed up her small, wise mouth. "That reminds me, daughter, I think I shall go to Boston to-day," she observed briskly.

"To Boston—to-day?" echoed her daughter

in surprise. "I don't believe I can possibly get away to go with you, mother. Malvina Bennett is coming to fix my black skirt; besides, there 's the baking and——"

"You needn't to feel that you must put yourself out on my account, Lizzie," Mrs. Carroll replied with a slightly offended air. "I am quite capable of going to China if it was necessary; I hadn't thought to mention it to you yesterday, but there's some shopping I want to do, so I'll get right off on the morning train."

"Will you have time to get around to see Bessie?"

"I'll make time," said grandma trenchantly. "I want to see what she's doing with my own eyes. I don't know what *you* think about her not asking her father in to her table, but I know what *I* think."

"Oh, mother, I hope you won't——"

"You needn't to worry a mite about what I'll say or do, I shan't be hasty: but I mistrust that Sipp woman is leading Lizzie into extravagance and foolishness, and I mean to

find out. I shall probably stay all night, and maybe all day to-morrow."

"But it might not be convenient for Bessie," hesitated Mrs. North, "you know what she said about telephoning; I guess I'd better let her know you're coming."

"Hump!" ejaculated grandma, "it wasn't always convenient for me to be up nights with her when she had whooping-cough and measles, but I did it just the same. I don't want you should telephone, daughter. I don't know just when I shall get around to Lizzie's house; when I do, I'll stay till I get ready to come home, you can depend upon that, if all the folks in Boston are there a-visiting. I'll go right in and visit with them. I'm going to take my best silk dress and my point lace collar, so I guess I'll be full as dressy as any of 'em."

Mrs. North sighed apprehensively, but in the end she saw Mrs. Carroll onto the train with a wondering sense of relief. "Mother always did know how to manage Bessie better than I did," she told herself vaguely.

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When Mrs. Carroll arrived at her destination the whistles were proclaiming the hour of noon. "I'm just in time for dinner, I guess," she observed cheerfully to the elevator boy, who grinned his appreciation. But there was no token of occupancy about the Brewster apartment when Mrs. Carroll rapped smartly upon the door.

"The missis is out," volunteered the boy, who had lingered to watch the progress of the pink-cheeked, smiling old lady; "but the girl's there. I seen her go in not fifteen minutes ago."

Thus encouraged Mrs. Carroll repeated her summons. After what seemed a second interminable silence the door opened, disclosing an alert presence in an immaculate cap and apron.

"How do you do?" said grandma pleasantly. "This boy here says Mrs. Brewster isn't at home; but I'll come in and wait till she does. I'm her grandmother, Mrs. Carroll; you've probably heard her speak of me, and I guess you're the girl she tells about in her letters

sometimes. You've got a pretty name, my dear, and you look real neat and clean. Now if you'll just take my bag, it's pretty heavy, and——"

Annita had not taken her beady black eyes off the little presence. "I never let strangers in when Mrs. Brewster's not at home," she said stolidly. "It ain't to be expected that I should. I guess you'll have to come again, about four this afternoon, maybe."

"I like to see a hired girl careful and watchful," said grandma approvingly, "but if you look in the photograph album I gave my grandaughter Lizzie, on her sixteenth birthday, you'll see my picture on the front page, and that'll relieve you of all responsibility." She pushed determinedly past the astonished Annita, and was laying off her bonnet in the front room before that young person could collect her forces for a second protest.

"So your mistress isn't coming home for dinner?" Mrs. Carroll's voice full of kindly inflections pursued Miss McMurtry to her final stronghold. "My! I'd forgotten what a small

kitchen this was. Dark, isn't it? I'm afraid that's what makes you look so pale. Now if you'll just make me a cup of tea—or let me do it if you're busy; I'm used to waiting on myself. I suppose I'll find the tea-caddy in here."

"You—let—my place alone—you!" hissed Annita, livid with rage, as Grandma Carroll laid her hand on the door of the cupboard. But she was too late; the open door disclosed a large frosted cake, a heap of delicately browned rolls and a roasted chicken.

"Well, well! your cooking looks very nice indeed. I suppose you're expecting company; but if you can spare me one of those tasty rolls I shall make out nicely with the tea. Be sure and have it hot, my dear." And grandma pattered gently back into the dining-room, smiling wisely to herself.

Just how many of Miss McMurtry's plans went awry that afternoon it would be hard to say. At three o'clock, when a mysterious black-robed elderly person carrying a capacious basket came up in the elevator she was

met in the corridor by a white-visaged fury in a frilled cap and apron, who implored her distractedly to go away.

"An' phwat for should I go away; ain't the things ready as usual?" demanded the lady with the basket. "I'd like me cup o' tea, too; I'm that tired an' cold."

Miss McMurtry almost wept on the maternal shoulder. "I've got a lovely chicken," she whispered, "an' a cake, besides the rolls you was hungry for, an' the groceries; but her gran'mother, bad luck to her, come this mornin' from the country, an' she's helpin' me *clean my kitchen*."

"Phwat for 'd you let her into your kitchen?" demanded the elder McMurtry indignantly. "I'm surprised at ye, Annie."

"I didn't let her in, she walked right out and poked her nose into me cupboard without so much as sayin' by your leave. I think I'll be leavin' my place; I won't wait t' be trowed out by her." Miss McMurtry's tone was bitter. "They ain't much anyway. I'd rather go where there was more to do with."

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"Right you are, Annie, my girl, I've towld you that same many's the time. But if you're leavin' the night be sure—" The woman's voice dropped to a hissing whisper.

"I'll do it sure, and maybe—" The girl's black eyes gleamed wickedly as she caught the creak and rattle of the ascending elevator "—I can do better than what you said in the end. It's safe enough with the likes o' them. They're easy."

At six o'clock in fluttered Elizabeth, a vision of elegant femininity in her soft furs and plumes and trailing skirts. Darling grandmamma was kissed and embraced quite in the latest fashion, and the two sat down cosily to visit while Annita set the table for dinner with stony composure.

"I've been here since noon," said grandma, complacently, "and I've been putting in my time helping your hired girl clean her cupboards."

"What! Annita? You've been helping Annita?"

"Why, yes; I didn't have anything else to do,

and the cupboards certainly did need cleaning. Seems to me, Lizzie, you keep a big stock of all sorts of groceries on hand for so small a family as yours."

"Do we?" asked Elizabeth, yawning daintily. "I'm sure I don't know what we have. Annita is perfectly competent to attend to everything in the kitchen, and I never interfere. She doesn't like it, and so why should I."

"What are you paying for butter this winter?" grandma wanted to know, after a thoughtful pause.

"I'm sure I don't know, the usual price, I suppose. Sam attends to the bills. He looks them over every night when he comes home, and gives Annita the money to pay them with."

"Hum!" commented grandma, surveying her granddaughter keenly over the top of her spectacles; "that's a new way to keep house, seems to me."

"It's a nice way, I know that," laughed Elizabeth.

She had changed subtly from the shy, undeveloped girl who had left Innisfield less than

a year ago into a luxuriance of bloom and beauty which astonished the older woman. There was an air of poise, of elegance, of assured dignity about her slender figure which fitted her as did her gown.

"It must be easy, certainly," agreed Mrs. Carroll, sniffing delicately, after a well-remembered fashion.

Elizabeth laughed and shrugged her shoulders in a way she had caught from Evelyn Tripp. "Now you know you are dying to lecture me, grandma," she said caressingly; "but you see, dear, that things are decidedly different here in Boston, and— But here comes Sam; he'll be so glad to see you."

Mrs. Carroll was very cheerful and chatty with the young people that evening. She told them all the Innisfield news in her most spirited fashion, and never once by word or look expressed her growing disapproval of what her shrewd old eyes were telling her.

Miss McMurtry, who stood with her ear glued to the crack of the door for a long half hour, finally retired with a contemptuous toss

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of her black head. Then, the coast being clear, she found opportunity to convey to their destination the comestibles dutifully provided for maternal consumption. "She's full as easy as the young one for all her meddlin' ways," said Miss McMurtry, "an' she'll be leavin' in the mornin', so there'll be no back talk comin' from her."

But for once Annita was mistaken in her premises. Mrs. Carroll, it is true, made no immediate reference to the disclosures afforded by her daring invasion of the kitchen fastnesses, nor did she even remotely allude to the probable date of her departure for Innisfield.

"I don't want you should make company of me, Lizzie," she said pleasantly, "or put yourself out a mite. I'll just join right in and do whatever you're planning to do."

Elizabeth puckered her pretty forehead perplexedly; she was thinking that Grandma Carroll's unannounced visit would necessitate the hasty giving up of a gay luncheon and theatre party planned for that very afternoon.

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Tears of vexation sparkled in her brown eyes, as she took down the telephone receiver.

Mrs. Carroll listened to the one-sided conversation which followed without visible discomfiture. "Now that's too bad," she observed sympathetically. "Why didn't you tell me you wanted to go, and I'd have eaten my lunch right here at home. There's plenty of cooked victuals in your kitchen pantry; I saw 'em yesterday whilst I was out helping around. I suppose your hired girl cooked that roast chicken and the layer-cake and the rolls for Samuel's noonings. I hope you'll see to it, Lizzie, that he takes a good, tasty lunch to work every day. But of course you do."

Elizabeth stared. "Why, grandma," she said, "Sam doesn't carry his lunch like a common workman. He eats it at a restaurant in South Boston."

"Hum!" mused Mrs. Carroll, "I wonder if he gets anything fit to eat there? Samuel appears to have gone off in his weight considerable since I saw him last," she added, shaking

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her head wisely. "He needs a gentian tonic, I should say, or—something."

"You're mistaken, grandma," Elizabeth said, with an air of offended wifely dignity. "Sam isn't the least bit ill. Of course he works hard, but I should be the first to notice it if there was anything the matter with my husband."

"Care killed a cat," quoted grandma sententiously, "and you appear to be pretty much occupied with other things. Home ought to come first, my dear; I hope you aren't forgetting that."

Elizabeth's pretty face was a study; she bit her lip to keep back the petulant words that trembled on her tongue. "Evelyn is coming, grandma," she said hurriedly, "and please don't—discuss things before her."

Miss Tripp was unaffectedly surprised and, as she declared, "*charmed*" to see dear Mrs. Carroll in Boston. "I didn't suppose," she said, "that you ever *could* bring yourself to leave dear, quiet Innisfield."

Mrs. Carroll, on her part, exhibited a smiling blandness of demeanour which served as an in-

centive to the lively, if somewhat one-sided conversation which followed; a shrewd question now and then on the part of Mrs. Carroll eliciting numerous facts all bearing on the varied social activities of "*dear* Elizabeth."

"I'm positively looking forward to Lent," sighed Miss Tripp; "for really I'm *worn* to a *fringe*, but dear Elizabeth *never* seems tired, no matter how many engagements she has. It is a perfect *delight* to look at her, isn't it, dear Mrs. Carroll?"

"Lizzie certainly does look healthy," admitted the smiling old lady, "but it beats me how she finds time to look after her husband and her hired girl with so many parties."

The result of Mrs. Carroll's subsequent observations and conclusions were summed up in the few trenchant remarks addressed to her granddaughter the following day, as she was tying on her bonnet preparatory to taking the train for Innisfield.

"I hope you'll come again soon, grandma," Elizabeth said dutifully.

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"I mistrust you don't mean that, Lizzie," replied Mrs. Carroll, facing about and gazing keenly at the young matron, "and I may as well say that I'm not likely to interfere with your plans often. I like my own bed and my own rocking-chair too well to be going about the country much. But I couldn't make out from what your father said just what the matter was."

Elizabeth shrugged her shoulders with a pretty air of forbearance. "I was awfully sorry about daddy," she murmured; "but I don't see how I could have done anything else under the circumstances."

"Well, *I* do," said Grandma Carroll severely. She buttoned her gloves energetically as she went on in no uncertain tones. "I've always been a great believer in everybody minding their own business, but there's times when a little plain speech won't hurt anybody. Things aren't going right in your house, Lizzie; I can see that without half looking. *I warn you to keep an eye on your kitchen pantry.* I mistrust there's a leak there."

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"I trust Annita perfectly," said Elizabeth, her round chin tilted aggressively. "And I'm sure I ought to know by this time."

"I agree with you there, Lizzie, you ought to know, but you don't. That girl is carrying things out of your kitchen as fast as the grocer and the butcher can bring them in; I don't think you can afford to let her spend your husband's money as she pleases, and that is what it amounts to the way you're managing now."

"But grandma," protested Elizabeth, "Sam looks over every one of the bills himself before he pays them."

"It isn't your husband's place to do your work and his own too, my dear."

Elizabeth hung her head, her face flaming with angry colour.

"You've been brought up to be a sensible, industrious, economical woman," pursued Mrs. Carroll earnestly; "but from what that Tipp girl said yesterday, I should imagine you'd taken leave of your senses. What does

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Samuel say to your spending so much money and being out so constant?"

"He—he likes to have me have a good time."

"Well, I'll lose my guess if *he's* having one," said grandma pointedly. "Samuel looked worried to death last night when Terita brought him the bills. And I took notice he didn't eat scarcely anything at dinner. For that matter, I didn't myself; there wasn't a thing on the table cooked properly. Now, Lizzie, I've said my say, and I'm going." She kissed her granddaughter heartily. "Take time to think it over, child, and mind you don't tell the Fripp girl what I've said. She could talk a bird off a bush without a bit of trouble."

"I wonder if everybody gets as queer and unreasonable as grandma when they are old," mused Elizabeth, as she picked her way daintily through the sloppy streets. "I'm sure I hope I sha'n't. Of course Sam is all right. I guess he'd tell me the very first thing if he wasn't."

Nevertheless, Mrs. Carroll's significant words had left an unpleasant echo in her mind which

haunted her at intervals all day. Under its influence she made a bold incursion into her kitchen, after a luncheon of chipped beef, dry toast and indifferent baker's cake.

"Have we any cold chicken, Annita?" she asked hesitatingly. "I—that is, I am expecting a few friends this afternoon, and I thought——"

Miss McMurtry faced about and eyed her mistress with lowering brows. "There ain't any chicken in the place, Mrs. Brewster," she said stonily; "an' as I ain't in the habit of havin' parties sprung on me unbeknownst, I'll be leaving at the end of my month, which is to-morrow—*if* you please."

Elizabeth's new-found dignity enabled her to face the woman's angry looks without visible discomfiture. "Very well, Annita," she said quietly. "Perhaps that will be best for both of us."

CHAPTER X

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Elizabeth greeted her husband that night with a speculative anxiety in her eyes born of the uncomfortable misgivings which had haunted her during the day. And when after dinner he dropped asleep over his evening paper she perceived with a sharp pang of apprehension that his face was thinner than she had ever seen it, that his healthy colour had paled somewhat, and that hitherto unnoticed lines had begun to show themselves about his mouth and eyes.

She reached for his hand which hung idly by his side, and the light touch awakened him. "Oh, Sam," she began, "Grandma Carroll insisted upon it that you were looking ill, and I wanted to see if you had any fever; working over there in that unhealthy part of town, you might have caught something."

"Who told you it was unhealthy?" he wanted to know. "It really isn't at all, little girl,

and you're not to worry about me—or anything."

At just what point in his career Samuel Brewster had acquired the Quixotic idea that a woman, and particularly a young and beautiful woman, should not be allowed to taste the smallest drop of the world's bitterness he could not have explained. But the notion, albeit a mistaken one, was as much a part of himself as the blue of his steadfast eyes or the bronzy brown of his crisp locks.

"You're not," he repeated positively, "to give yourself the slightest anxiety about me. I never felt better in my life." And he smiled determinedly.

"But, Sam dear, I shall be obliged to worry if you are going to be ill, or if—" a misty light breaking in upon her confused thoughts, "you are keeping anything from me that I ought to know. I've been thinking about it all day, and I've been wondering if—" she lowered her voice cautiously—"Annita is perfectly reliable. I've always thought so till to-day. Anyway, she's going to leave to-

morrow, and you'll be obliged to go back to my cooking for a while, till I can get some one else."

The somewhat vague explanations which followed called for an examination of grocer's and butcher's accounts; and the two heads were bent so closely over the parti-coloured slips that neither heard the hasty preparations for departure going on in the rear.

"It looks to me as if our domestic had been spoiling the Egyptians," hazarded Sam, after half an hour of unsatisfactory work. "But I really don't know how much meat, groceries and stuff we ought to be using."

"I might have found out," murmured Elizabeth contritely. "I've just gone on enjoying myself like a child, and—and I'm afraid I've spent too much money. I haven't kept any count."

Her husband glanced at her pretty worried face with a frown of perplexity and annoyance between his honest eyes. "The fact is, Betty," he burst out, "a poor man has no business to marry and make a woman uncom-

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fortable and unhappy. You haven't spent but a trifle, dear, and all on the simplest, most innocent pleasures; yet it does count up so confoundedly. I wanted you to have a good time, dear, and I couldn't—bear—" He dropped into a chair and thrust his hands deep into his pockets.

"Then we *have* been spending too much on —contingencies; why didn't you tell me before?"

He bit his lip. "We've spent nearly every dollar of our reserve, Betty," he said slowly, "and this month I'm afraid—I don't see how I am going to meet all of the bills."

"Oh, Sam!" gasped Elizabeth, turning pale.

A voice from the softly opened kitchen door broke in upon this crucial conversation. "You'll please to excuse me, Mrs. Brewster, but I've had word that my mother is sick, an' I'll have to be leaving at once. My month's up in the morning anyway, an' I hope you'll not mind paying me my wages to-night."

Her lip curled scornfully as she glanced at the tradesmen's slips scattered on the table.

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Miss McMurtry openly despised people who, as she expressed it, were always "trying to save a copper cent on their meat and groceries." She herself felt quite above such economies. One could always change one's place, and being somewhat versed in common law, she felt reasonably secure in such small pecadilloes as she had seen fit to commit while in the employ of the Brewsters.

"I should like to ask you a few questions first about these accounts," said the inexperienced head of the house sternly. "How does it happen that you ordered fifteen pounds of sugar, seven pounds of butter and two of coffee last week? Surely Mrs. Brewster and I never consumed such an amount of provisions as I see we have paid for."

Miss McMurtry's elbows vibrated slightly. "I only ordered what was needed, sir," she replied in a high, shrill voice. "Sure, you told me yourself not to bother the madame."

"I did tell you that, I know. I thought you were to be trusted, but this doesn't look like it."

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A fearsome change came over the countenance of the respectable young person in the frilled apron. "Are you meaning to insinooate that *I* took them groceries?" she demanded fiercely. "I'll ask you to prove that same. Prove it, I say! It's a lie, an' I'd be willin' to swear to it in a court of justice. That's what comes of me workin' for poor folks that can't pay their bills!" Miss McMurtry swung about on her heels and included Elizabeth in the lightning of her gaze. "I come here to accomydate her, thinkin' she was a perfec' lady, an' I've slaved night an' day in her kitchen a-tryin' my best to please her, an' this is what I gets for it! But you can't take my character away that easy; I've the best of references; an' I'll trouble you for my wages—if you can pay 'em. If not, there's ways I can collect 'em."

"Pay her, Sam, and let her go, do!" begged Elizabeth in a frightened whisper.

"I ought not to pay the girl, I'm sure of that; but to save you further annoyance, my dear—" He counted out twenty-two dollars, and pushed

the little pile of bills across the table. "Take it," he said peremptorily, "and go."

The two gazed at each other in silence while the loud trampling footsteps of the erstwhile gentle and noiseless Annita sounded in the rear. Then, when a violent and expressive bang of the kitchen door announced the fact that their domestic had finally shaken off the dust of her departure against them, Elizabeth burst into a relieved laugh. She came presently and perched on her husband's knee.

"Sam, dear," she murmured, "it is all my fault, every bit of it. No; don't contradict me—nor interrupt—please! We can't afford to go on this way, and we're not going to. We'll begin over again, just as we meant to before I—" she paused while a flood of shamed colour swept over her drooped face "—tried to be fashionable. It isn't really so very much fun to go to card-parties and teas and luncheons, and I don't care a bit about it all, especially if—if it is going to cost us too much; and I—can see that it has already."

All her little newly acquired graces and affec-

tations dropped away as she spoke, and her husband saw the sweet, womanly soul he had loved and longed for in the beginning looking out of her brown eyes. He kissed her thankfully, almost solemnly. "Dear Betty," he whispered.

"Couldn't we—go away from this place?" she went on after a while. "It isn't very pleasant, is it? and—I'm almost ashamed to say it—but Evelyn Tripp has such a way of making things look different to one. What she says sounds so—so *sensible* that I can't—at least I haven't done as I intended in hardly anything."

"There's a little red cottage to let, with a pocket-handkerchief lawn in front and room for a garden behind, not half a mile from where we are working," Sam told her, "but I haven't mentioned it because it's a long way to Tremont Street and—Evelyn." His blue eyes were full of the laughing light she had missed vaguely for more weeks than she cared to remember.

"Let's engage it to-morrow!" exclaimed

♡ ♡

Elizabeth. "Why, Sam dear, we could have roses and strawberries and all sorts of fun out there!"

When, after missing her friend for several days, Miss Tripp called at the Brewster apartment she was astonished beyond measure to find her dearest Elizabeth busy packing some last trifles, while several brawny men were engaged in taking away the furniture.

"*My dear!*" she exclaimed. "What *are* you doing?"

"We're moving," said Elizabeth tranquilly. "You know I never cared particularly for this apartment, the rooms are so dark and unpleasant; besides the rent is too high for us."

"But *where*——"

"I was just going to tell you; we've taken a little house away over near the new waterworks." Then as Miss Tripp's eyebrows and shoulders expressed a surprise bordering on distraction, "I felt that it would be better for us both to be nearer Sam's work. He can come home to luncheon now, and I—we shall like that immensely."

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"But you're going *out of the world;* do you *realise* that, my dear? And *just* as you were beginning to be known, too; and when I've tried *so* hard to—" Miss Tripp's voice broke, and she touched her eyelids delicately with her handkerchief. "Oh, *why* didn't you consult *me* before taking such an irrevocable step? I'm sure I could have persuaded you to change your mind."

Elizabeth opened her lips to reply; then she hesitated at sight of Evelyn's wan face, whereon the lavishly applied rice powder failed to conceal the traces of the multiplied fatigues and disappointments of a purely artificial life.

"You'll be glad you didn't try to make me change my mind when you see our house," she said gaily. "It has all been painted and papered, and everything about the place is as fresh and sunny and delightful as this place is dark and dingy and disagreeable. Only think, Evelyn, there is a real fireplace in the living room, where we are going to burn real wood of an evening, and the bay-window in

♡ ♡

the dining-room looks out on a grass-plot bordered with rose-bushes!"

"But the neighbourhood, dear!" wailed Evelyn. "Only think what a social Sahara you are going into!"

"I don't know about that," Elizabeth told her calmly. "Several of the engineers who are working with Sam live near with their families, and Sam thinks we are going to enjoy it immensely. He is so glad we are going."

Evelyn had folded her hands in her lap and sat looking hopelessly about the dismantled rooms. "You don't seem to think about me, Betty," she said, after a while. "I—I am going to miss you terribly." Tears shone in her faded eyes and her voice trembled.

Elizabeth's warm heart was touched. "You've been very good to me, Evelyn," she said. "I shall never forget all that I've—learned from you. But we're really not going out of the world, and you shall come and see us whenever you will, and bye and bye we shall have strawberries and roses to offer you."

CHAPTER XI

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The roses on the tiny lawn of which Sam had spoken were in full bud, and Elizabeth was searching eagerly for the first streak of pink in the infant blossoms when she was surprised by the sight of an imposing equipage drawing up at the curb. The fat black horses pawed the gravel disdainfully, shaking their jingling harness, as the liveried footman dismounted from his perch and approached the mistress of the house.

"I beg pawdon, miss," he said loftily; "but can you tell me where—aw—Mrs. Samuel Brewster lives?"

"I am Mrs. Brewster." Elizabeth told him.

Whereupon the man presented a card with an air of haughty humility.

Elizabeth's wondering eyes uprose from its perusal to the vision of a tall, stout lady attired in purple broadcloth who was being assisted from the carriage. The hot colour

flamed over her fair face, and for an instant she was tempted to run into the house and hide herself and the neat checked gingham gown she was wearing. Then she gripped her courage with both hands and came forward smiling determinedly.

The august personage in purple paused at sight of the slender, blue-frocked figure, and raising a gold-mounted lorgnette to her eyes deliberately inspected it. "You are—Samuel Brewster's wife?" she asked.

"Yes, Mrs. Van Duser." Elizabeth's voice trembled in spite of herself, but her eyes were calmly bright. "Won't you come in?" she added politely.

The lady breathed somewhat heavily as she mounted the vine-wreathed porch. "I will sit down here," she announced magisterially; "the air is pleasant in the country."

Elizabeth's brief experience in Boston society came to her assistance, enabling her to reply suitably to this undeniable statement of fact. Then an awesome silence ensued, broken only by the bold chirp of an unabashed robin

successfully hunting worms in the grass-plot.

"Where is your husband?" suddenly propounded the visitor.

"Mr. Brewster is engaged in making a topographical map for the city; I do not know exactly where he is this afternoon," replied Elizabeth, her colour paling, then rising as she recalled the too well-remembered words of Mrs. Van Duser's late communication. "Did you wish to see him?"

Mrs. Van Duser was apparently engaged in a severe inspection of the adventurous robin. She did not at once reply.

Elizabeth looked down at the toe of her shabby little shoe. "Sam—comes home to lunch now," she faltered. "I—he hasn't been gone long."

"Ah!" intoned Mrs. Van Duser, majestically transferring her attention from the daring robin to Elizabeth's crimson face.

"Samuel has neglected to call upon me since his return to Boston," was Mrs. Van Duser's next remark, delivered in an awe-inspiring con-

tralto; "though it is evident that he owes me an acknowledgment of his present good fortune."

Elizabeth fixed round eyes of astonishment upon her visitor. "I can't think what you mean," she exclaimed unguardedly.

"And yet I find you here, in this sylvan spot, far removed from the follies and temptations of your former position, and—I trust—prospering in a modest way."

"Thank you," murmured Elizabeth, pink with indignation, "we are getting on very well."

"What rent do you pay?"

Elizabeth looked about rather wildly, as if searching for a way of escape. The robin had swallowed his latest find with an air of huge satisfaction, and now flew away with a ringing summons to his mate. "We pay thirty dollars, Mrs. Van Duser," she said slowly, "by the month."

"Um! Why don't you buy the place?"

"I don't think—I'm sure we—couldn't—" hesitated Elizabeth.

♡ ♡

"You are wrong," said Mrs. Van Duser, again raising her lorgnette to her eyes; "if you can afford to pay three hundred and sixty dollars in rent you can afford to own a home, and you should do so. Tell Samuel I said so."

"Yes, Mrs. Van Duser," murmured Elizabeth in a depressed monotone.

"Do you keep a maid?"

"No, Mrs. Van Duser, I do my own housework." Elizabeth's brown eyes sparkled defiantly as she added, "I was brought up to work, and I like to do it."

Mrs. Van Duser's large solemn countenance relaxed into a smile as she gazed into the ingenuous young face at her side.

"Ah, my dear," she sighed, "I envy you your happiness, though I had it myself once upon a time. I don't often speak of those days, but John Van Duser was a poor man when I married him, and we lived in a little house not unlike this, and I did the cooking. Do you think you could give me a cup of tea, my dear?"

When Samuel Brewster came home from his

work at an unexpectedly early hour that afternoon he was astonished to find an imposing coupé, drawn by two fat, shining horses, being driven slowly up and down before his door; and further, as he entered the house, by the cheerful sound of clinking silver and china and low-voiced conversation. Elizabeth, pink-cheeked and smiling, met him with an exclamation of happy surprise.

"I am so glad you came home, Sam dear," she said. "Mrs. Van Duser was hoping to see you before she went."

And Mrs. Van Duser, looking very much at home and very comfortable indeed in Sam's own big wicker chair, proffered him a large white jewelled hand, while she bade him give an account of himself quite in the tone of an affectionate relative.

"You have a charming and sensible wife, Samuel, and a well-conducted home," said the great lady. "I have seen the whole house, cellar, kitchen and all," she added with a reminiscent sigh, "and it has carried me back to the happiest days I ever spent."

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The young engineer passed his arm about his Elizabeth's shoulders as the two stood at the gate watching the stately departure of the Van Duser equipage. "Well, Betty," he said, "so the mountain came to Mahomet? But the mountain doesn't seem such a bad sort, after all. I liked the way she kissed you good-bye, though I should never have guessed she was capable of it."

Elizabeth drew a deep breath. "I never was so frightened in my life as when she first came," she confessed. "But she is kind, Sam, in her way, though at first I thought it wasn't a pleasant way. And O, Sam dear, she thinks we gave up our flat and came out here just because she wrote us that letter; she was as complacent as could be when she spoke of it."

"Did you undeceive her?"

"N-no, dear, I didn't even try. Perhaps it was the letter—partly, and anyway I felt sure I couldn't make her think any differently whatever I might say. But I did tell her about Annita and about how thoughtless and selfish I was, and——"

♡ ♡

"Did you tell her about the Tripp lady?" he suggested teasingly.

"No," she said gravely. "Evelyn meant to be kind, too; I am sure of that."

"O benevolent Betty!" he exclaimed with mock gravity. "O most sapient Elizabeth! I perceive that in gaining a new friend thou hast not lost an old one! I suppose from now on you will begin to model your small self on the Van Duser pattern. My lady will see to it that you do, if you see much of her."

Elizabeth looked up at her tall husband, her brown eyes brimming with thoughtful light. "It is good to have friends," she said slowly; "but, Sam dear, we must never allow any—*friend* to come between us again. We must live our own lives, and solve our own problems, even if we make an occasional blunder doing it."

"We've solved our problems already," he said confidently, "and I'm not afraid of the blunders, thanks to the dearest and best little wife a man ever had."

♡ ♡

And Elizabeth smiled back at him, knowing in her wiser woman's heart that there were yet many problems to be solved, but not fearful of what the future would bring in the light of his loving eyes.

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